Breathless

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by PaddyChan

Summary

Forced to abandon their friendship due to the endless war raging between Senju and Uchiha, Hashirama and Madara are now facing each other on the battlefield as leaders of their clans.

In one reality Madara has to mourn his last remaining brother, before being ultimately defeated by the Senju leader and losing the trust of his people.

In another one, the odds are even worse.

However, when Madara faints on the battlefield, Hashirama finds himself unable to kill the man he once considered his best friend. With Madara on the verge of dying, Hashirama decides to take matters into his own hands. And maybe, a single change is enough to steer fate into a different direction.

Prologue

The metallic clash of swords echoed far in the early morning air. The smell of blood in his nostrils, the enemy's face in front of him… except… "Madara! It's not too late! We can still make peace! We can end this senseless slaughtering!"

The Uchiha dragged in a rattling breath, before he forced himself to speak. "It was too late… before we were even aware, Hashirama!" The grip around his Gunbai's handle tightening even further, the Uchiha leader charged towards Hashirama once more.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Because sometimes, things have to go down before they can get better.

Hashirama clearly remembered the day he first noticed.

It had been early spring, the first buds of the year starting to open. The sun had been shining down on them, rays already warm on his skin. The two clans had tactically avoided each other all winter. Supplies were always low, money tight and neither clan wished to battle the other on such unfortunate circumstances.

However, the short months of something way too tense to be called peace had come to an end and thus, he found himself trading blows with the man he had been best friends with all these years ago. “Madara!” The Uchiha leader didn’t answer. He had never hidden his love for battle with Hashirama, usually being the first one to call out for him and dash forward. Instead, he wordlessly formed handsigns, letting dragon-shaped fireballs wind around the roots he had drawn from earth, burning them to ashes. When Hashirama charged forward to trap him into another fight of tai-jutsu to stop his raging fire from churning the ground even further, Madara was breathing hard.

Not that Hashirama’s breath didn’t quicken during their battle. Madara was a brilliant mind, a genius -on the battlefield as well as off- and much smarter than himself, as the Senju leader wasn’t too proud to admit. He was the only one Hashirama could match on eye-level in a fight, always keeping him on his toes. However, it usually took much more to have him show signs of exhaustion. Before he was able to deepen the thought, Madara charged at him again, most likely just to prove him wrong. He probably had fallen ill in winter and now had gone to battle without giving his body enough time and rest to heal. Stubborn Uchiha.

That night had been the very first time in years he dreamed of him again.

They were children, meeting at the river, Hashirama being overjoyed to finally meet the only real friend he had again. Madara talked about the village they would create. They would need to have some sort of ranking system for the shinobi living there, so nobody would be send to battles they wouldn’t get out of alive.

Hashirama had agreed, adding they’d need another rank specifically for children, when Madara got up and went to the river to relieve himself. Hashirama sneaked behind him, making his friend freeze. “You really can’t, eh?” He taunted, laugher dying down when Madara lost his footing and slipped off the cliff, falling into the river. There was no need to

be worried, Hashirama knew. The other was a shinobi, just as himself, such a fall would harm neither of them.

“Madara?”, he called. “Are you alright?”

The raven-haired boy didn’t break to the surface.

“Madara?”

Black, tangled hair rose to the surface, face down and unmoving.

“Madara!”

Hashirama jerked out of bed, his own desperate call still ringing in his ears. His yukata clung to his skin, soaked with sweat and he roughly rubbed his face. A dream. Just a dream.

Their next encounter didn’t even take two weeks.

It was a battle for territory, that once again had Uchiha and Senju clashing. The Nagishawa-river crossed both of their lands and thus, both clans rose claim on its waters, leading to yet another brutal clash between them.

Sometimes, Hashirama wished nothing more than closing his eyes, pretending him and Madara were children again, friends, training to get better, strongest in their clans, instead of seeking to kill the other.

However, they already were.

There was nobody stronger, mightier on the battlefield than the two of them. And fate, cruel as it was, had decided to find out who of them truly was stronger, who was able to kill the other, instead of simply knocking each other down.

Hashirama sidestepped a kick, trying to throw Madara off balance by hitting his collarbone in the very same move. The Uchiha evaded his counter, jumping back a few feet to gain space. He lifted his hands, having Hashirama prepare for another of his destructive fire-jutsu. They were too close to- A brutal coughing fit shook the Uchiha’s body, nearly making him go on his knees.

Without even thinking about it, Hashirama reached out for him. “Madara?”, he asked, knowing what he was supposed to do now. He had to press on the opening Madara was giving him, using the advantage he now had, the Uchiha’s defence down as another rattling cough shook him. That was what was expected of him, what every Senju on the battlefield was waiting for. And yet…

And yet.

Madara straightened again. “Retreat!” His voice sounded more breathless than Hashirama was used to, as the raven-haired man yelled out the order. “The river isn’t worth it!”

Within seconds, the Uchiha pulled back, taking seven wounded and two casuals with them. As usual, Madara was the last one to follow, protecting his clan's back.

Hashirama stayed behind, looking after the man he had once been friends with.

It was later that evening when they were back in their own village, the wounded taken care of, that Hashirama couldn't fight back his nagging thoughts any longer. Something didn't feel right and his insides churched with desire to seek Madara out, to determinate what it was, that was wrong with him… but… maybe he was just overreacting. Tobirama often enough chastised him for being overprotective.

As if he'd known about his pondering -and he wouldn't put it past him to actually do- his little brother entered, a bowl of stir-fry in each hand, setting one down on the small desk he used for any kind of paperwork, usually in matters of their purchasers.

"Your desk is a mess", Tobirama informed him, pushing some scrolls aside, before offering the bowl left in his hand to Hashirama. "I brought you dinner."

The Senju leader smiled. Tobirama and him might be as different as day and night -whether it was their looks, their fighting style or their personalities- but there was nobody in this world he was closer to than his last remaining brother. "Thanks." He took the bowl, as well as the chopsticks his brother offered, waiting for him to take the other dish and sit down with him.

The look Tobirama gave him was the closest one could get to rolling his eyes without actually doing so, before the younger Senju sat down next to him on the floor. Even though he was the analytical part of them, Tobirama wasn't unaware about something bothering his brother. However, he wasn't certain how much of that actually was due to his credit, since Hashirama's emotions were basically an open book for everybody who cared to take a look (and sometimes those who rather wouldn't, too, if he was honest). Yet, normally, his older brother tended to talk about whatever distressed him -at least to Tobirama, if nobody else. It was strangely unsettling to see him eat without even a trace of joy or the blabbering he had a knack to whenever it was just the two of them.

"Anija." He put aside his now empty bowl. "What's bothering you?"

He couldn't have their leader pondering about nonsense, neglecting his position… and even more, he couldn't have his brother do so all alone, feeling as though he had no one to turn to since he was clanhead. He might be charismatic and powerful -both essential traits for his position- yet at the same time… a little dense, to put it nicely.

For a moment, Tobirama suspected his brother would try to negate, making the alarm bells in his head ring. Hashirama never hid anything from him. Except that one time at the river…

"Something's wrong with Madara."

Tobirama supressed a huff. He was an Uchiha, the question rather was what *wasn't* wrong with him. "What are you referring to?", he finally asked, choosing the productive answer

instead. Hashirama nibbled at his lower lip, clearly unsure how to answer correctly. “He’s… off”, he simply settled for, deciding at the very last second to evade revealing the Uchiha’s apparently waning health. “It just feels like something’s wrong.”

“Whatever it is, I can’t help you pinpoint it out, as long as that damned Izuna keeps me off. I’ll try to get rid of him next time.”

Tobirama didn’t get rid of Madara’s brother next time.

Nor the one after.

Hashirama however, was unsettled even more during their fights. Madara didn’t show weakness, not once left an opening again, always keeping Hashirama on his toes.

And yet.

Something was off. So very off, he had to fight the one part of him, the one that soughed to heal above all else, more than once during their already legendary fights.

The dreams got worse after each one.

Another daimyo seeking to enlarge his power, hiring the Senju to crush further resistance.

Another noble family seeking to stop him, hiring the Uchiha to put his approach to a halt.

Another battle of two clans seeking revenge, tearing each other apart, to make them pay for their loved ones’ death in blood.

The ground below was soaked in sweat, piss and blood, making the mud rise to their ankles. Hashirama leapt aside, blocking Madara’s katana with his own, making sparks fly between them. From the corner of his eye he could see Tobirama fighting Izuna, around them dozens of other clan members battling each other. There weren’t any casuals yet, a miracle of its own in this raging fight. Hashirama didn’t even know how long they were fighting already, having lost all sense of time, as he usually did during their battles. He pushed Madara’s blade aside with his own, forcing the Uchiha to retreat a few feet and Hashirama knew, *knew* just months ago this wouldn’t have been enough to send the raven-haired man back.

However, before he was able to pounder any further about it, Madara forced him to counter another Katon, making him draw wooden hands from the ground to stop his rival’s giant fireball from tearing its way across the battlefield. It didn’t even take a whole second before the two leaders clashed again. Both, Uchiha and Senju members had long since learned not to get between the two powerhouses, if they didn’t want to get crushed in their midst.

Being this close again, Hashirama took in the Uchiha leader’s pale face. Madara had always been beautiful. Thin, elegant eyebrows topping his black -now red, Tomoe spinning- eyes, surrounded by pitch-black lashes. High cheekbones, underlining his regal features, that

appeared slightly too slim for his taste. Lips perfectly curved and… blue. Hashirama frowned. Madara's lips had taken on an unhealthy shade of blue, accompanied by wet and ratting breaths forcing their way from between them way too fast once more. However, this was even worse than the last times they had clashed.

Hashirama blocked a kick aiming for his calves, before forcing the Uchiha into a duel of tai-jutsu nobody else would have been able to keep up with. The battle already raged long, longer than most they had during the last year, as both of their customers had been willing to pay high for victory.

Madara used his Gunbai to deflect one of his blows, forcing them to part again. The Uchiha landed in a skid, fingers already forming tiger, then boar, forcing Hashirama to prepare for yet another of his giant fire-jutsu since he knew they would-

"Madara!"

His call tore across the battlefield even before Izuna's panicked call of "Aniki!", as he dashed forward to catch the Uchiha's wilting body before he was able to fall face first into the mud. Wrong. So very, deeply wrong.

Hashirama went down on one knee, supporting Madara's upper body. The first thing he noticed was -yet again- the Uchiha's ratting, wet breathing. This close, it sounded even worse. His heart was racing, his lips blue, his skin sickly pale -even for him, who had always been of fair skin, other than Hashirama himself who was rather sun-kissed. Hashirama lowered a hand on Madara's chest, sending glowing green chakra through first the armour, then the body beneath, to determinate what it was that very obviously was wrong with the boy he had been friends with as a child.

"Aniki!" Inzuna had managed to shake off Tobirama but was forced back by a large Suiton the younger Senju sent in his way. Hashirama, however, only distractedly noticed it, as he found the source of Madara's struggling breath. The Uchiha's lungs were filled with viscid fluids, probably making it hard for him to breathe even off the battlefield. In his lower lung, an infection had already festered, weakening it even further. However, there was no external damage on Madara's body -aside from the ones he had obtained during their fight today.

Hashirama raised his head as he noticed how the fight around them had quieted down. Both, Senju and Uchiha seemed equally shocked the battle of their leaders did have a winner, as they had always parted in a draw, ever since they had met each other on the battlefield for the very first time.

"Hashirama-sama!" He recognised Fukito, one of the warriors whom had been close to his father, extremely experienced on the battlefield by now. He had been supporting Butsuma until he had died on the battlefield. The ash-blonde man appeared next to him, the Uchiha were still too shocked to stop him, while Izuna was kept off by Tobirama. "Finally. Now, end him! It will take a long time until these dogs are fit to hold a candle to us, if they ever will be. We have gained victory today!"

Hashirama listened half-heartily, too focussed on examining Madara's poor physical condition. His whole metabolism had suffered severely with the lack of oxygen. It was

obvious this had been going on for a rather long time now, probably worsening with each passing day. His heart seemed rather healthy, most likely the reason he had still been up to fight, while his lung's condition was a disaster. Hashirama noticed signs of healed infections, his bronchial tubes were stuffed with fluids containing bacteria, making every breath painful. He would have to fuse oxygen right into his bloodstream, while being careful not to apply too much pressure, as he'd tear Madara's arteries from the inside otherwise.

"Hashirama!" The missing honorific finally made him raise his head, staring straight at one of his father's closest confidants; Masaru. He, too, was one of the clan's most experienced shinobi, highly respected among the older warriors, as most of them shared his deeply conservative believes. "Kill that bastard. Now, before we can't hold the others off any more!"

But what was there to hold off? The Uchiha had stopped fighting as soon as Madara had fallen, as had the Senju. But, once Madara was dead, they would only fight even more furious, attempting to revenge their killed leader. His clan expected him to end the cycle of hatred by killing the only one who had been able to stand up against him, yet that would only make things worse in the upcoming future. Others would stride after Madara, seeking to revenge him, to hurt and kill, feeding the blooming hatred.

And yet, beneath all that hate. All these fights. All the blood and madness… *Let's build our perfect village to protect our brothers!...* Beneath all that… *I challenge you to a race up the mountain!...* Madara was… *Our clans won't listen to weak pups barking. We'll have to get strong, stronger than anyone else!...* Madara was still…

"No."

He didn't notice Izuna stumbling into a halt, Tobirama turning on his heel, or Toka's open mouth. None of it mattered. What did, was Fukito's eyes hardening, as Masaru drew his katana. "Then, we will do."

The roar seemed to tear across the battlefield even before Hashirama clasped his hands together, teeth grit, eyes wild with something not even Tobirama would be able to name. The ground itself shook, as it rose towards the sky, revealing the snarling face of a nin-jutsu none before had ever witnessed, a giant body rising ever higher, Hashirama on its head holding the still body of the Uchiha leader.

Masaru's katana clattered as it fell to the ground.

The wood golem brought its fist down only once, roaring in destructive rage.

As the ground shattered beneath it, squelching the two Senju who had aimed to kill Madara, Hashirama was already back to infusing healing chakra and rising the oxygen levels in the Uchiha's blood. The deafening silence of both, Senju and Uchiha soldiers, went unnoticed. Instead of trying to reach his older brother, Izuna stared up to him halfway on the Senju leader's lap, on top of this… monster that apparently was his nin-jutsu. The golem didn't even move any more, yet nobody dared to step any closer even before it rose its hand again, revealing the tattered remains of the two Senju who had opposed their leader.

All the way up, he could hear his brother taking in a ratting breath, before he was overwhelmed by a coughing fit.

“Easy…” He could hear the Senju bastard, as he carefully rose his brother’s upper body. “Try to breathe slowly, you aren’t getting enough air.”

It didn’t help much.

Carefully, Hashirama lifted the Uchiha’s chest a little further to ease the coughing fits that shook his too thin body. He could feel his rips beneath his blue mantle. His body weighted close to nothing… this state was one of brutal neglection for himself and Hashirama had to bite his tongue to stop himself from chastising Madara for doing so. “I can’t treat your lungs sufficient enough, your health is too bad. Try to breathe slowly, I’ll infuse more oxygen into-” Unaware the shinobi below him could hear -maybe even unaware they even existed or where he was in his delirium- the Uchiha groaned. “Shut up… Idiot”, he mumbled, eyes still closed, as his wet breaths finally slowed. Hashirama sighed in relief.

“Your lungs are filled with fluids, severely infected and you’re underweight.” Hashirama, frankly spoken, didn’t care who listened, still focussed on his rival. Madara’s state was disastrous, how did he let himself get this far? And yet, even in his waning health, there was nobody expect himself who was able to face him without getting defeated within minutes. How had he been able to stand his ground in that state?

The Uchiha’s brows furrowed as he exhaled, sinking further into Hashirama’s lap without fully realising what was happening. “My lungs were always bad. But they got worse around a year ago… I couldn’t cough up whatever’s inside anymore”, he mumbled, eyes not even opening.

“You could hardly even breathe”, the Senju chided. “What were you thinking? Madara! Did you want to die in this fight? You knew you were getting worse, that’s why you tried to avoid tai-jutsu! There was a high chance for you to-” “Izuna would’ve taken my place”, Madara interrupted, coughing once more and spitting a mouthful of yellowish fluid next to him, forcing his eyes to open, staring into Hashirama’s in a way that felt… off, somehow. “You would’ve crushed him with hardly a fight.”

The younger Uchiha might have been offended by that, if it wasn’t for that Mokuton-monstrosity in front of him.

“I couldn’t-” “So you went into battle in that disastrous state of yours, day after day? Madara! It was only a matter of time until you’d black out! If anybody else-” Hashirama stopped his rambling, once he noticed the Uchiha had done exactly that once more. His unconscious form invited to rank his eyes across him, and he had to stop himself from doing so, before gathering him in his arms.

Slowly, the wooden golem sunk back to the ground, the monstrosity seeming nearly hesitant to leave its Master alone in this mess. As Hashirama stepped down from the golem’s head, neither Senju nor Uchiha dared to move, even less get in the way of the Senju leader, who carried Madara’s unmoving form in his arms. The Uchiha’s head had fallen against his chest, making his mount of hair covering his face.

“The Senju will cease further fighting right now. Madara is in no condition to battle any longer. If there are any Uchiha wishing to oppose me, I will meet them heads-on.” Hashirama’s voice left no room for arguments. Without even realising what he was doing, he carefully stroke back a straying strand of Madara’s hair that had tangled in a clasp of his armour. When no one stepped forward, he rose his voice. “This senseless war is over. *Now!*”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Old people giving zero fucks.

Chapter Notes

Whoever guesses what exactly Madara suffers from gets an imaginary cookie.

On the eastern side of the great forest, an open, grassy area was the natural border between Senju and Uchiha territory. Both clans carefully made sure to keep the large, grass-grown plain clear, in order to prevent tactical hiding spots for the other.

Now, a single wooden house, standing out like a sore thumb, had been erected in the middle, a single tree next to it. Uchiha and Senju had retreated to their secret villages, as they had been told to by Hashirama. The Uchiha had obeyed, since Hashirama frankly spoken held their leader hostage (besides, there was no one strong enough to oppose him anyway). The Senju did the same, since… Hashirama was their clan-head (and no one wanted to be crushed by a giant fist anytime soon).

There were only seven people entering the plain, as they had been ordered to. Or rather, asked, since neither, Hashirama nor Madara, were able to actually *order* the elders of their clans to do anything. To get old in times like these, shinobi needed to be clever, strong, and above all: stubborn. All of them had been around when their leaders had been born -hell, Hibiko had actually been the one to *help* Hashirama being born- and thus, they could be hard to deal with.

However, in this… situation, the five elders -three of them Uchiha, two Senju- had decided to follow their leader's orders -or rather, Hashirama's, since Madara had still been unconscious- and made way to the single wooden house on the plain between their territories, accompanied only by their clan's co-leaders.

From the north-western side, Akiyama and Hibiko made way across the short grass, led by Tobirama.

From the eastern side, Itsuko, Sarana and Makoto stepped closer, Izuna in front of them.

None of them spoke and in the heavy silence, since even the wind had decided to lay low, the voices from inside the hut sounded all the way across the grass.

“So that’s it? You just wait until I fall unconscious to go around and declare peace in the middle of a fucking war?”

“You passed out cold! What was I supposed to do?”

“Don’t you dare to-” A hit of painful, struggling coughing interrupted what was supposed to be one of Madara’s infamous outbursts of temper.

“Easy… here, take- all right, then don’t.” Hashirama’s voice got quiet, hard to hear even with the silence surrounding them. “I knew something was wrong, but I didn’t… Madara, when you took these herbs to supress the coughing, your lungs got only worse because you didn’t get rid of the secretions inside anymore. You were drowning with your clothes dry.”

All the way across the plain Izuna froze, even though he’d sworn himself he would keep his posture.

“Then what was I supposed to do?” Madara sounded strangely beaten. “There was no way I was able to fight with these fits. I had to avoid Izuna taking my place at all costs!”

“Peace!” Hashirama sounded nearly desperate. “We should’ve made peace, Madara, instead of you wearing your body down to nothing!”

There was a pregnant pause, before Madara took in a rattling breath. “This won’t work out.”

“It will!” Hashirama’s voice didn’t even carry a hint of doubt and for a long while, he didn’t get an answer. However, when he did, all seven (ex-)shinobi outside stopped in their tracks.

“The last time you said that, we were kids meeting at a river, dreaming of a perfect village to protect our brothers in.”

Of course, rumours had made rounds after the incident at the river where they had been forced to separate as enemies. Some said, they had met as children, not recognising the other as who they were and which clan they belonged to. Others mused they already had been fighting in a previous life, driven by the well of hatred between their clans. Thirds thought they simply met by coincidence again and again, deciding not to battle as each other as they were of equal strength.

Even Tobirama and Izuna didn’t know the real intensity of their friendship, of the dreams they had shared all these years back.

“You see?” Hashirama’s cheery voice cut the suddenly strange feeling air. “I told you!”

“And then you decided to climb a tree to steal some honey from a bunch of wild bees and lost your ugly trousers when you fell down.”

The three Senju outside didn’t need much imagination to see their leader’s head drop and a heavy cloud slam right onto it. “Ah… I hoped you might have forgotten that…”

“The image of your naked ass has given me nightmares ever since”, Madara gave back brutally, before changing the topic. “When is the meeting with the elders due?”

“Oh… right now, actually.”

Madara was silent for a second, casting out his senses -Hashirama wouldn’t even notice if one snuck right behind his back; his sensory qualities so low they were basically backwards. It didn’t even take him a second to fly right into rage upon realising where their expected visitors were. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, you moron, I can’t believe you didn’t even-” Just as the house’s two door opened -opposite of each other, so neither Senju nor Uchiha had to leave their back open to each other while entering- another brutal coughing fit shook the Uchiha leader, squeezing whatever little breath was left out of his lungs.

“Aniki!”

However, before Izuna was able to get to his brother, Hashirama had already carefully caught the Uchiha’s frail frame. “Hush… Didn’t I tell you not to get riled up? You don’t have energy left to spare!” As Madara attempted to calm down, trying to even his breaths, the coughing merely got stronger.

“Shit!” Quickly, the Senju leader laid a glowing hand on Madara’s chest. The lack of air had him hyperventilating, causing his already weak lungs to fail even further. “It’s alright, I’ve got you… I’m sorry I forgot, hush…” He carefully held Madara’s back -much more delicate than his own, each dorsal prominent- to ease the stiffening muscles.

Izuna grit his teeth as the Senju-dog touched his brother. How dare he? He had killed adult Uchiha when he had just been a child, their blood was on his hands forever. The very same hands, that now held Madara’s back, keeping it upright until he had calmed down. Izuna wasn’t ignorant. Nor was he blind. He knew, something had been wrong with Madara. He rarely trained with Izuna anymore and if, he insisted on either Gen- or Nin-Jutsu. Whenever there had been a flu, cold, or fever going about, it hit Madara worse than any of his brothers. He had had four cases of pneumonia -at least that was the number the younger Uchiha was aware of. Even if he was in good health, he tended to have coughing fits, which he very carefully hid from anyone -even him. Yet, whenever he had tried to talk to Madara about it, his older brother had simply waved it off, telling him he worried too much, before changing topics straight after. But he didn’t have any idea how bad his brother’s health had waned, until he had passed out on the battlefield, at the hands of Hashirama. A part of him scourged itself for not realising how very bad his brother’s health had gotten. However, he knew if Madara didn’t want anybody to find out, no one would. His older brother was nothing if not master minded.

Tobirama, from the other side of the room, watched, too. He knew, Hashirama had never gotten over the way him and that blasted Madara had parted at the river all these years ago. He had never blamed his younger brother for outing his secret, but he did mourn the Uchiha more than he should. Hashirama held on tight to those he cared about. Well, that wasn’t entirely true, since his brother basically cared about everyone he met -bless and curse his way too kind heart- but those closest to him, he would protect with his life.

It was Sarana, who finally broke the silence. She was the only one of the five eldest whose hair hadn't turned white, the tightly pulled back black locks a strange contrary to her wrinkled skin. “So”, she huffed, gruff, as if she was just complaining about the aches her back gave her with age. “You’re the one who declared the war over, abducting our clan-head minutes after.

You do realise, your actions speak different from your words?" The way she said it, one might think she chastised a child whom she had caught sneaking away with the cookie jar.

Itsuko snorted. "He is a Senju, what did you expect? It is no secret they are more brawl than brain." His voice didn't sound a day older than thirty and he nonchalantly took out the pipe he had stored in his yukata.

Akiyama narrowed his eyes. "Maybe you should use that brain you apparently claim to have, considering whom you're talking to."

He was answered with another snort by Itsuko, followed by huffed laugher from Sarana's wrinkled lips. "All five of us have lived their life longer than most, outlived all of our fellow clan members by years. Let us be honest, death is no threat to any of us anymore."

"I hope we will be able to end these negotiations *any* death-threats", Hashirama cut in. Madara scoffed. "You do realise, wandering off with me after deciding to end a war raging for centuries doesn't make this meeting *negotiations*."

"But it does." Tobirama's red eyes remained unimpressed as he spoke up for the first time in this room. "It simply renders your position a weak one."

The Uchiha leader's eyes flashed red. "How dare you-" "Tobirama." Hashirama stepped in before the situation escalated any further, as he was very well aware it would. "Madara's health has waned for months -years, actually. Yet, it's no secret he was -still is- the only one able to put on a fight against me, battle after battle, until his lungs finally gave out today. That alone makes his position anything *but* weak."

"Enough of this nonsense, it leads nowhere." Makoto's remaining left eye fixated the Senju leader, who nearly expected to see her Sharingan spinning. "Why didn't you kill Madara on the battlefield?" Honorifics were useless at this point, she decided. They had gotten past that before the meeting even started.

Six and a half pairs of eyes piercing him, Hashirama was at a loss for words. Yes, indeed… Why hadn't he? Because he couldn't bear the thought of killing the one who had once been his best friend? Because he hadn't given up hope? Because Madara had been helpless, unable to fight anyway? Because... because… "There was no way making peace by spilling even more blood", he finally settled for, as it was the truth -even through merely a part of it. "It's because you're a moron", Madara grumbled, coughing once more. "That's why, you ninny."

"You're not helping, Madara!"

"I did my fair share of helping you, after we searched your sandal for two fucking hours when you lost it in the river."

"You threw me in!"

"I told you not to stand behind me!"

“How’s it my fault you can’t even p-” Madara’s elbow met the Senju leader’s guts, making him wheeze.

Yes, Tobirama thought wryly. This was the reason Hashirama didn’t kill the Uchiha. This, and this alone, may he deny it as much as he wanted.

Itsuko dragged on his pipe, puffing seemingly without a care in the world. “Weren’t we asked here to talk about cease-fire?”, he asked, when the Senju leader blabbered complaints about unfair moves and how it hadn’t even been his fault.

Hibiko, who had been silent to far, finally spoke up. She was undeniably by far the oldest amongst them. “You cannot possibly take these youngsters serious.”

Sarana huffed. “It seems, we actually agree on something, Senju.”

“I lost both of my sons to the Uchiha”, Hibiko stated, making the elders, as well as Izuna and Tobirama next to them go tense.

Makoto’s sole eye turned cold. “If you expect pity, you are wasting your breath. There is none amongst us who didn’t lose family to the Senju.”

The old Senju didn’t even blink, however, kept silent for a beat, before going on. “None would have been lost, if not for this war.”

The silence between them was thick enough to be cut with the dullest of kunai and in the end it was Hashirama, who broke it. “This war has been going on and on for centuries, each of us killing the other, feeding the hatred and grief. I will end it.” His eyes flickered to Madara, whose breathing sounded nearly even by now, without him even realising what he was doing. The elders however, didn’t miss so easily. “I can do without you”, he stated, his voice growing hard for once, the sheer infinite amount of chakra flaring, before the brown pools warmed again. “But it wouldn’t be the same. I wish for both clans to seek peace. Just imagine… there would be no other clan daring to go against us, Senju and Uchiha united. The fights will die down. We could have peace! Peace for our children, finally!”

“Except your future children aren’t the ones you seek peace for, Hashirama”, Hibiko noted, making her clan head turn towards her in confusion. Sarana stole Itsuko’s pipe, dragging in a deep breath of smoke, before returning it. “I have always chastised our clan head for his temper, but at least he’s not as dull as yours.”

“Hey!”

“It’s too much to ask for brains to go with power”, Akiyama agreed. “If one of them had both, we wouldn’t be stuck here.”

“You’re supposed to be on my side”, Hashirama lamented, making the old man scoff. “I have been on your side when I didn’t tell Hibiko you tried to steal her sealing scrolls when you were nine.”

“He did *what?!*”

A large drop of sweat rolled down the Senju leader's cheek. "Ahaha… M-Madara, what do you think of this? Would you agree on making peace, finally?"

Madara was silent. Long. Longer than expected. So long in fact, that Hashirama started fidgeting on his cushion. When he finally spoke, his voice didn't waver. "When we were children, we weren't powerful enough to make peace. When we grew up, we were. But the older I got, the more I realised attempting to make peace would make the clan fall out, eventually, as many would severely disagree." He knew Izuna would have been one of them, hating the Senju with fierce passion. "I couldn't risk the Uchiha falling apart. As my health got worse, I knew they would follow me into a cease-fire even less. I had to prevent Izuna from taking my place as clan-head at all costs. There'll be a cold day in hell before I'll allow for him to battle with you." His eyes burned with a fire, irises smouldering black and hot. "I decided to do the only thing I could: Fighting you until the very end. Until I'd take my dying breath upon your hands, the only one worthy."

He turned to his younger brother, who stood next to Makoto, face frozen.

"Izuna." His voice was soft, as if they were children again, Madara telling him the nightmares wouldn't harass him anymore, because he was there to protect him. His older brother hadn't spoken to him like that in a very long time. "If you decide this attempt for peace is treacherous, we will leave right away and never speak of it again. I am not of much use in a fight any longer, my days as clan-head are running out. However; I will do everything in my power to help you as you take over. I will protect you with my dying breath, no matter what."

Izuna swallowed, willing down the tears stinging in his eyes. He hadn't cried ever since… he couldn't remember when he'd cried last. Madara… Madara was everything he had left. Three brothers dead, killed by the Senju, massacred, maimed… tearing his heart apart further with each body they had buried -or rather, what was left of them. "Aniki… I… I…"

Crack.

The younger Uchiha flinched, head whipping around. Hashirama had released his hold on Madara, his palms on the floor now instead. His forehead had hit down hard enough to crack the wood beneath it, making his hair spill over the ground, as he bowed -cowered- in front of him. "Izuna!" Hashirama didn't raise his head. "I know you have lost all of your younger brothers to the Senju. I am sorry. So deeply, deeply sorry… if there was a way, I would undo everything that happened, I would protect them with my life, I swear! If it is my life you want in exchange, I will give it to you instead. But…" His voice was nothing but a whisper by now. "Please… I beg of you… Please."

Izuna took in a shaking breath. Peace with the Senju… what a joke. All it would do was getting his clan get stabbed in the back, the aftermath hitting Madara worst. They should go back. Back to their village, where they belonged, protecting the children, protecting the clan. There had to be a way to overcome Madara's illness. He hadn't told anyone of it, surely there was a cure somewhere. They would seek out the best doctors, no matter the price, the best healers, no matter where. Except… except the world's best medical shinobi was right in front of him, face pressed into the wood at his feet. What a joke, again.

“Can you heal him?”

Hashirama still didn’t look up. “I don’t know if I can fully heal whatever sickness sticks to him, but I can nullify the damage done and prevent further from happening. However, I need time. His body is too weak for treatment right now, his condition is too unstable; his lungs have been failing twice today already.”

Izuna’s hands balled into fists. “I need you to… I need you to heal him. If this attempt for peace is what you require for payment, I don’t care. Just… heal my brother, Senju. Because if you don’t, I will make you regret it.”

The Senju clan-leader lifted his head, eyes hard and determined. “I swear.”

Senju Hibiko walked across the room, took Itsuko’s pipe and dragged in a deep smoke, before returning it to the Uchiha. “Peace it is, then.”

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Totally straight Hashirama doing totally straight things because he's totally straight.

Chapter Notes

Wow, some of you actually took a guess about Madara's sickness. I didn't think anyone would care enough to do so. Thank you, guys, for all of your lovely reviews!
Since none of you got it quite right, here's another clue. Starts with M and is an inheritable disease based on genetic mutation(s).

Four fucking days.

That's how long it took for Senju Hashirama to get two clans full of sworn enemies to come together in a village build out of wooden houses in the middle of the forest, hanging up two banners with a Senju and Uchiha clan-emblem and getting said clans assembled below them. It was quite impressive, actually. Or at least it would have been if Hashirama wouldn't be waiting under his clan's banner, beaming like a nuclear explosion and nearly bouncing on his feet with barely supressed glee. It took some of his dignity. No, scratch that. Most of it. All of it. But he never had a lot to begin with, didn't he?

Madara stepped forward from the rest of his clan to meet Hashirama under the Uchiha banner. As a sign of trust and good will, both leaders didn't wear their armour, a gesture their fellow clan members had decided to follow. For a few moment, the two clan leaders stood in front of each other, none of them moving. They could feel their brothers' eyes burning in their backs, as well as the ones of each and every clan member. This was a historical day, something none ever even dared to envision… and it would either bring peace or ultimate destruction.

Hashirama offered his hand.

Madara took it, his palm cool in the Senju leader's warm fingers.

This was what they had dreamed of, years and years ago. The thought nearly brought tears in Hashirama's eyes. "From this day on… we will be brothers!"

At the other side of the great place, Senju Hibiko once again stole Itsuko's pipe, making the old Uchiha grumble in annoyance. "That idiot just doesn't get it."

Sarana huffed. The five elders had been the only Uchiha and Senju members mingling together, as they stood a little outside, between the facing clans. “We’ll be pushing daisies before one of them gets even close.”

Itsuko snatched back his pipe. “Get your own one, you old hag. I’ll gift you one for your next birthday. If you live that long, it is.”

“Get me one, too”, Akiyama grumbled. “Kami knows I’ll need it.”

“Fuck off.”

As it turned out, Uchiha and Senju had rather different concepts of comfort. Whereas the Senju preferred to spread over a large area, gardens and ponds that would flourish as the year went on between their houses, in order to avoid breathing down each other’s necks, the Uchihas’ houses barely had any space between them. He suspected that way they felt more protected, however; even for him, who was a rather touchy person (yes, yes, he knew, Tobirama chastised him often enough about it), this lack of personal space was too much. But well, everyone adapted in their own way and as long as the Uchiha were comfortable, everything was fine.

Hashirama felt various Uchihas’ wary stares stinging at his back, as he walked down the main street, heading towards the building at the Uchiha compound’s centre. None dared to whisper about the Senju leader as he made his way to the clan leader’s house. He had a suspicion about why Madara had been able to make it through the official unification ceremony and the following banquet without even coughing once. How often did he have to tell him; it was indispensable Madara coughed up the fluids clogging his lungs! He was working on getting the infection under control, but with the large amounts of bacteria infesting the mucus inside his lungs, there was no way to get that far if his stubborn Uchiha refused to cough at least something up and getting rid of it that way. Besides, there was still the fact that his clogged lungs weren’t working nearly sufficient enough.

Lost in thought, Hashirama only realised he was already down the road and had kind of forgotten knocking when he already entered the house. The inside was light with candles as the newly build wooden-houses had neither electricity nor running water. They would take care of that as soon as possible. For now, it was most important to get every family their own house to live in.

Hashirama frowned as he looked around. The house’s insides were as spartan as everyone else’s at this point; it would take some time to move all of their belongings from their old villages to their new one. Izuna was nowhere to be seen, but that was to be expected. The Uchiha had decided to leave three guards at a time at their old village as long as they still had any belongings at the place. Izuna had decided to accompany them for tonight.

Frowning, Hashirama slipped off his sandals and entered.

No Madara.

He made his way to the kitchen (or rather what would be the kitchen in a few more days), then to the living room.

Still, no Madara.

Did something happen? Had Madara decided to leave, too? Did he need some time for himself? In a last attempt to find his friend, Hashirama made way upstairs to where he knew the bedrooms had to be. Apart from a futon and a dresser, the room was mostly empty, but he recognised Madara's mantle that looked rather neglected as the Uchiha leader had carelessly dropped it on the single chair next to the window. Still, where was-

Splash.

Hashirama stiffed. Was that…? He listened closer and some more noises followed, quieter ones, yet they clearly indicated water moving. Madara took a bath. Lucky one, he could at least heat the water by himself before washing. But well, Madara's skin was a little too cool for his liking anyway, some warmth would help. He also was too pale, even though Hashirama couldn't do but admire the snowy skin contrasted by the dark clothes his friend mostly was clad in. The mental image of Madara's pale skin flushed by the water's heat put a smile on his lips. He would finally look healthy, glowing, once he was done scrubbing himself, water running down his chest; slimmer that Hashirama's, rather designed for speed but raw power and-

"What the fuck are you doing in here?"

Hashirama blinked stupidly at his friend. The Uchiha glared at him, standing in the doorway to the bathroom, clad in a comfortable yukata that probably was meant for sleeping, his mane of hair still wet, blue streaks mixed with back shining in the candlelight. "Uhm…" He was barefooted, his feet way more elegant that Hashirama could ever hope his own to be. A dancer's feet, he thought. And his dance brought the most beautiful way of destruction. "Uh…"

Madara's eye started to twitch. Uh-Oh… Oh, shit. Uhm… "I wanted to check on you", Hashirama blurted. The twitch got worse. Oh shit, oh shit. "Then get the fuck out of my house and check up on Tobirama if you feel like annoying the living hell out of someone!"

Finally, Hashirama remembered the actual reason he had been worried in the first place. "You didn't cough all day."

"No, I didn't. But if you insist, I'll cough right up in your face, if it makes you happy and leaving."

Hashirama frowned. "I'm serious, Madara. You didn't cough once all day. Not during the ceremony, at the banquet or anytime until the evening. Did you take your herbs again? I can't help your body getting rid of the bacteria if you refuse to expectorate the mucus floating your lungs!"

"So, what was I supposed to do?" The Uchiha stepped closer, glaring at him. The fact that he was shorter than the Senju leader didn't make it any less murderous. "Standing in front of

you, coughing my lungs out, while you talked about us having created a village of two clans on eye-level? Refusing the soup at dinner because I knew it'd just send me into a coughing fit? My people are wary enough of this union! I mustn't feed it by displaying weakness at that moment!"

So proud.

Hashirama sighed, wary. The Uchiha were a prideful clan -probably even more so than the Senju- and Madara was their leader. Of course, he had to be proudest. "Lay down. I'll take a look at your lungs. I don't think this day has done them any good."

Madara opened his mouth, about to tell Hashirama to fuck off, before it occurred to him the stupid Senju wouldn't have it. That bastard was nothing if not persistent. He was deadly tired and the fastest way to get Hashirama out of the house was probably to let him do… whatever he did. "Fine", he huffed, getting down on his futon. "Just be quick about it."

The Senju beamed at him, making Madara roll his eyes. What was wrong with Hashirama and his moods? And worse, why was he even friends with this moron? He'd better get a dog, they obeyed at least if told to fuck off. Couldn't have worse puppy eyes than Hashirama, anyway.

Said Senju carefully knelt beside Madara, waiting for him to settle down before lowering a glowing green hand on the Uchiha's chest. The fluids he had watered down somewhat last time already were hard and sticky again, clogging Madara's bronchial tubes. "The infection has gotten worse", he noted darkly. If nothing happened, it was only a matter of time until it turned into a full-out pneumonia. "Does breathing cause you pain?"

"No."

Hashirama sighed. "Are you in pain if you don't take your herbs?"

No answer.

"Madara!"

"… Yes."

Stubborn Uchiha.

"Normally, I'd try to beat the infection first. But it's useless since it'll start all over due to the large amount of bacteria in the mucus sticking to your lungs. And I can't get rid of that because your lungs would most likely collapse under the stress. The only way is to water it down as far as I can, so you can cough it up. But that's useless if you take those herbs to supress your coughing-reflex!"

"I got that the first time you told me", Madara growled. "I'm not stupid… unlike other people in here."

Hashirama pouted. "I'm trying to help, you ungrateful Uchiha." Carefully, he infused more chakra. Since the day had gone without any fighting whatsoever (not even verbally),

Madara's oxygen level was acceptable at least. Carefully, Hashirama went to work on the fluids inside his friend's lungs. He had to try to clean his bronchial tubes at least a little to ease Madara's breathing. If Madara got over that thick head of his, he might be able to get rid of the mucus within a couple of weeks. As they progressed, he would be able to finally treat the pestering and certainly painful infection.

"Your pulmonary tissue is scarred", Hashirama noted quietly. "I don't think I'll be able to get the deformed parts working again even after you're better. I would have to redo the damage and regrow the original state. You'll probably have to deal with a decrease in oxygen diffusion capacity in those areas."

Madara huffed, coughing a little, as Hashirama's work started to bear fruit. "I didn't expect to live past the coming winter", he stated, making the Senju flinch. "I've had six cases of pneumonia I'm aware of -I don't know about some more, they didn't act up enough for me to care."

But he should have! It wasn't as if Madara had a body in reserve he could just switch to if this one gave out. He had to take care of it! "Everything else comes first for you, hm?", Hashirama murmured, his other hand resting on Madara's throat, glowing green, in order to prevent his coughing fits from getting to harsh. "Your brother, your clan… You need to stop neglecting yourself. See, what it does to you."

Madara gave a bristly laugh, interrupted by ugly coughs ripping out of his mouth. "That coming from the guy who offered Izuna to kill him if he wanted to."

"Oh, shut up, you're just as bad."

For a while, both clan leaders kept silent, Madara's chest being slowly warmed by the Senju's chakra. Night had fallen hours ago, it had been a long day and neither knew what tomorrow would bring. Would everything go smooth? Would their village grow? They had planned on installing running water within the next week for everyone. After that, they would need specialists to deal with the electricity. Nobody in their clans knew how to do so, and they had already send word to civilians who were more skilled in the arts of technology than those of crafting jutsu. Hopefully, no one would pick up a fight, the peace between Senju and Uchiha was fragile as an egg-shell. But in the end, everything would work out. It had to. They had been fighting for this way too hard to give up now.

Madara's breaths deepened. "That's the spirit", Hashirama praised. "Try lifting your head a little, your neck'll get stiff. Should I get you a pillow? Madara?" The Uchiha didn't answer, eyes closed. His lashes cast shadows on his cheeks in the dim light the nearly burned down candles were casting. His lips were slightly parted to breathe easier.

Hashirama couldn't do but swallow once he realised Madara had fallen asleep beneath his hands.

Sleep was the most vulnerable state any shinobi offered. There was a reason even children were taught to sleep light in case of upcoming attacks and no shinobi chose their resting spot carelessly. Was Madara just that tired? Sure, the day had been long and stressful, but that

much? Did his sickness wear him out so much he had been unable to fight the grasp of sleep? Or…

Or... Hashirama swallowed once more, looking, no *gawking* at the Uchiha's peaceful features. Or did he just trust Hashirama enough to guard his sleep, to keep any threats off, to keep him save at his most vulnerable?

Shinobi never slept alone if they could help it, as it meant having one's back unprotected at their weakest. Normally Izuna would be right in the next room and besides, there wasn't anyone daring to attack Madara in his own house. Despite his sickness, he was nothing but the strongest Uchiha. Tobirama most probably would be awake until the sun rose, trying to organise as much as possible for the upcoming days.

Nibbling at his lower lip, Hashirama carefully let the medical chakra run out.

Madara mumbled in his sleep, mourning the loss of warmth and comfort.

"And then he said he didn't even expect to survive the upcoming winter."

Fushito didn't even know how to respond to that. His wife, Nanami, had asked their daughter to bring Madara-sama some herbs for the night, as he had requested those regularly before this mess of a village with the Senju had been created within a matter of days.

Nanami lowered her eyes. "I didn't know… I knew he was ill, but I had no idea it was that bad. I thought he just…" The Uchiha didn't have medical support the way the Senju did. There weren't any medical shinobi in their clan. In fact, she was the only one who had at least some knowledge in the field of herbs and medical treatment, an expertise she had inherited from her now deceased grandmother. She wasn't much of a fighter, and thus had decided to support her clan off the battlefields as best as possible.

Fushito exhaled deeply, taking a moment to choose his words. "It is good you told us what you heard at Madara-sama's house. But I don't want you to ever eavesdrop at him again, do you understand? He is our clan-head and deserves more respect than that."

The seven-year-old nodded. Other than him or even Madara-sama himself, she had never seen a battlefield at her tender age. As soon as Madara had taken over the clan, he had pulled back all children under the age of twelve from the fights. The advantage the Senju had with their lowered number of fighters lasted not even a month, before Hashirama took control and over night, the Senju children disappeared from the battlefields as well. At that time, Fushito's daughter had already been trained in the arts of war and he had taken sides with those who rebelled against their leader for casting away the old ways.

But then, his cousin has taken his six-year old to the battlefield despite Madara-sama's orders. The child had been killed in a matter of minutes, standing no chance against adult Senju, who had no qualms to kill any Uchiha. Their clan-head had ordered a gathering after the battle and while everyone had expected for him to throw a fit, he had carried in the small body and pulled back the white sheets covering it. The child's face had been twisted in fear,

tear-strains still wetting the blood drained cheeks. “Is this what you seek?”, he had asked. “For your children to die without even a chance against their enemies in this war?”

That day, Fushito’s only daughter had turned four and normally would have entered the battlefield for the first time.

He had cuddled her close to his chest as soon as he got home.

“I'd rather choose between a rock and a hard place than trust a Senju”, he noted. “But…” He shook his head. “You should have been on the battlefield that day, Nanami. When Madara-sama fell, their leader protected him even from his own clan members. That giant-” He stopped, shuddering even though it had been Senju who had been smashed under its first in Hashirama’s rage.

“Madara-sama never shows weakness”, Nanami agreed. “But… it’s not that he could afford to, could he? There are enough of us who still mourn the days Tajima lead the clan. They wouldn’t let any chance get past them to go back to the not-so-old ways.” She kissed her daughter’s hair as the child climbed in her lap.

Lips pressed together, Fushito stared out of the window to where their clan-head’s house was hidden in the dark of the night. “If that Senju truly is the only one able to heal him, this village *has* to work out.”

“It will. It has to.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Assholes everywhere.

Chapter Notes

It's Mucoviszidosis, apparently better known as Cystic fibrosis.
Screw me for not being a native speaker.

Also, Merry Christmas everyone!

“What the fuck are you doing in my house” weren’t the nicest words Hashirama had ever woken up to. But they weren’t the worst either, so he supposed it was alright.

“Izuna wasn’t here, so I wanted to stay the night in case-” “End that sentence, Hashirama, I dare you. End it and I’ll end *you!*” Hashirama’s head slammed down as a heavy raining cloud hit it from above. Not wanting to leave Madara alone for the night in case anything happened, he had drawn a small wooden bed from the wall opposite of the Uchiha’s futon. The leaves had been perfectly soft for sleeping and he hoped Izuna wouldn't mind he had burrowed his blanket. His lower lip started to pout and a muscle in Madara’s cheek twitched, as the bastard gave him the most pitiful puppy eyes this side of fire country. “No wonder I slept like hell!”

“I’m sorry for you”, Hashirama mumbled, sounding actually fucking devasted for him. “You can neither pee or sleep with someone around you… all these cuddles you’ll miss once you’re married.”

“The only thing I’m missing is privacy, something you still don’t get the concept of!”

Hashirama shook off his raining cloud, hopping from his make-shift bed. “Mind if I take a look at you?”

“Yes.”

And just like that, the cloud went slamming back into existence.

“But Madara-” “Fuck off. I’m going to make breakfast.”

“Make me something, too?”, Hashirama asked hopeful, ordering a few strands of hair that had decided to mind their own business while he slept.

“Aren’t you supposed to annoy the living hell out of your brother?”, the Uchiha asked, walking downstairs, still in his yukata. If Hashirama expected him to be decent after he’d spend the night in his bedroom on a whim, he was an even bigger idiot than Madara thought. He coughed twice, swallowing some fluids and finally made it to the kitchen. They didn’t yet have much of… well, basically anything, but there was some left-over rice from yesterday that he re-heated in boiling water, before cracking an egg above and adding some soy sauce. As he mixed his breakfast together, careful not to spoil anything as the bowl had gotten rather full, Hashirama entered the kitchen, too, and his stomach growled at the thought of food. “Mind if I take the rest?”, he asked hopeful, meaning the last bit of still hot rice Madara hadn’t made breakfast for himself of. The Uchiha sighed inwardly. If he said No, Hashirama would respect that, but he would also stare at him with the most devasted expression in shinobi history. He was such a child.

“Suit yourself”, he answered therefore, taking the first bite. Kami, he was hungry. Between the bites, he set up a pot of tea, waiting for the water to boil.

It didn’t take long for both men to practically inhale their breakfast, before Madara poured each of them a cup of tea, handing one to Hashirama, who beamed as if he’d just won… scratch that, he beamed just the way Hashirama always beamed when he was happy for whatever reason occurred to him at the time.

Carefully, Madara sipped from his cup. For some reason, hot liquids worsened the coughing, even though he did feel better afterwards. He set down his teacup roughly, before covering his mouth with a hand, as a heavy fit of coughing overcame him.

Not even a moment later, Hashirama was behind him, one glowing hand resting on his chest, the other one at his throat. “I would like to treat to every evening, if that’s alright with you”, the Senju murmured in his ear. “The night has done you well, your bronchial tubes aren’t on the verge of collapsing anymore.” His warm breath nearly made Madara shiver.

After the Uchiha had calmed again, Hashirama went back to his own tea, gently blowing to cool it. “After running water and electricity are dealt with, we should start thinking about who will lead the village.”

“It will be you.” Madara’s voice didn’t carry a hint of doubt, as if he was merely stating a long since decided fact. Hashirama frowned. “I wanted you to become the village’s leader”, he argued, making his friend chuckle. His frown deepened. What was to laugh about that? “You do realise this village only exists because you simply decided the war was over when I fainted on the battlefield right in front of you?”, the Uchiha asked. “You are the driving power behind this whole idea. Besides-” He lifted a hand to silence his friend before he could disagree, “I am ill, Hashirama. Yes, you are doing your best to heal me, and it might save my life in the end. Or maybe it’ll only drag out the inevitable. No one wishes for a leader who simply passed out on the battlefield and could, by all means, do so again.” He went back to his tea.

“You will not!” Eyes hardening, Hashirama leaned across the table. “Don’t you dare to-“ He stopped mid-sentence, lifting his hands to take Madara’s face in between them, forcing the Uchiha to look at him. “This is our dream, Madara! Ours! And now, that we finally made it reality, I will have nothing take you from me. *Nothing!* The devil may dare, I will fight him.”

Madara swallowed, pupils blown wide upon Hashirama’s unexpected outburst of temper. His face was close, way too close, he could even see the green sprinkles in the deep pools of his irises. “I…” What did that idiot think he was doing?! “I don’t…”

Out of the blue, Hashirama grinned. “Of course, you won’t! I won’t let you die, no matter what’s going on in that thick-headed skull of yours.” The Senju winked at him, giving him a thumps-up. “After all, I’m the world’s best medical shinobi.”

“Complacent bastard”, Madara coughed, making his friend grin even wider. “Now, get out of my house, some of us have work to do.” Within the blink of an eye, the Senju’s grin was replaced by a whiny expression. “But… Madara!”

The raven-haired man took Hashirama’s empty mug out of his hands, putting it in the sink along with his own, before making his way back upwards to get dressed. “See you later, Senju.”

Within the next five days, running water was installed in every of the village’s houses. Way faster than expected, electricity took only three more. To everyone’s surprise, a civilian merchant had asked to move in the village, and, upon Hashirama’s and his approval, had opened a small store that offered basic goods as well as some luxury. Even something called chocolate, but that was way too expensive for some little brown blocks in a box.

Today, they had started building what was supposed to be the academy for children, as none of them would be sent to battle until they were twelve at least.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Standing next to each other, Senju and Uchiha leader looked over their village, watching their people walking about, doing their daily business, if still insecure about each other. Both clans had been mortal enemies of centuries, and now they were simply supposed to get along with each other? It was bound to be tense and awkward at best for everyone. But well, all things considered, it could be worse.

“Our village”, Hashirama continued, smiling quietly, genuinely. “And this is just the beginning. It’ll become so much more.”

“Keeping your expectations at bay, I see”, Madara noted dryly, making his friend pout. “Just you wait! I heard rumours about the Yamanaka considering joining us.”

“The Yamanaka?” Surprised, Madara looked at his friend. The Yamanaka had always attempted to stay out of the conflict between Senju and Uchiha, mostly minding their own business whenever possible. But well… maybe exactly that was the reason they considered

joining the village now. The Yamanaka weren't known for their outstanding abilities in combat and had thus developed something way more… well let's just say you couldn't trust your own mind in battle with them. Madara remembered one particular occasion that had left him with nightmares for a week and a brain feeling like a shredded pillow in the aftermath. "That's… something."

"Mind your euphoria, wouldn't want you to get overexcited."

Madara's mouth fell open. "Did you just… make a sarcastic comment?"

Hashirama threw him a full faced grin, teeth shining, eyes sparkling, his features a picture of joy. He was beautiful whenever he smiled, radiating love and peace in a way that was even more precious considering the power he had in battle. "Never! By the way, the Daimyo replied to my letter, concerning the future of our village… He says he'll need details about the future leadership, since it no longer will be the leader of each clan to make decisions but the one leading the village. And no", he lifted a finger before Madara could cut in, "I still want that to be you!"

The Uchiha curled his lips. "It was way easier to obtain power with the two strongest shinobi-clans at war. Now, he'll fear us overthrowing him."

Hashirama frowned. "You know as well as I do how little titles are valued amongst our clans."

"*I* know that", Madara emphasised. "*He* doesn't."

The Senju frowned. "He asked to meet me personally about it. We'll see if we can convince him. Otherwise, we'll have to do without his support. But if he cuts us off, it'll be difficult to get the village off the ground. We'll have to do our best."

"We?"

"Well, yes! We're the founders of this village, after all. Of course, we'll go. I can even take better care of you on the road, when nobody's watching!"

That sent Madara into a coughing fit having nothing to do with the poor condition of his lungs, making Hashirama fuss all around him like the sad puppy he was.

"You shouldn't go!"

Madara frowned. The two of them were sitting in their kitchen, having lunch together, before the once-a-month clan meeting was due in the afternoon. It had been Izuna's turn to cook and he had made his brother's favourite -Inarizushi- as well as the sweet tea he had come to like so much. "I can't let Hashirama go alone. That moron will probably promise the village's eternal service or some bullshit. You can't negotiate with him, he'll just give in. Someone *has* to make sure he doesn't fuck up."

“What about that brother of his?” Izuna took a piece of food with his chopsticks without bringing it to his mouth. “That bastard certainly won’t let him get out of line.”

“And have two Senju represent the village?”, Madara asked, making Izuna’s lips press together. “I don’t like this”, the younger Uchiha stated. “It might be a trap.”

“Of course, it might be.” Madara shrugged. “But it’ll have to be one hell of one to make either of us starting to sweat. Besides…” He took another piece on inarizushi, nearly humming with how good it was. Izuna had outdone himself, even though he hated cooking. “There’s still a few days left. We need to move everything out of the old settlement before leaving. And I’ll need an aviary for the birds.”

The younger Uchiha nodded. “They miss you”, he agreed. “The last time, Akira wouldn’t even take any of the meat I offered. Instead, I just got the Eyes of Doom.” Madara chuckled. Yes, Akira was indeed the most loyal of his birds, the by far fastest -if not strongest- but her loyalty came with the price of her basically hating everyone else. Not even Izuna was safe if she was in a bad mood. “If the clan meeting goes smooth enough, I might have enough time to take them home afterwards.”

“Makoto scheduled the meeting two hours earlier”, Izuna reminded. “Because she… Kami, I still can’t believe it.”

Madara chuckled. “Trust the elders to be the only ones getting along in this mess of a village.”

His little brother made a face. “I still can’t believe she re-scheduled the entire clan meeting because she wants to play Shogi with… what was her name? Hibiko?” Between his bites, Madara hummed in agreement, enjoying the last pieces of his favourite food, before putting his plate in the sink to wash later. They’d need to get going if they wanted to make it on time, as the gathering hall wasn’t near the centre of their compound, but rather at its back since they had needed it to be rather large to fit its purpose.

Side by side, the two brothers made way to the gathering hall. Once a month they held a meeting; the clan-leader, the elders, the strongest warriors and whoever had any concerns to bring forth. There were always some, reaching from “My husband has an affair and I want revenge” to… well, basically everything. There was nothing Madara couldn’t remember having discussed at some point or the other. While there were always people at the gatherings -at times more than others, yes, but always some- he frowned when he got closer now. There were Uchiha gathered even in front of the building, it felt as though half the clan had come together.

“I just hope they don’t intend on complaining about headaches from having to see Senju faces everyday”, Izuna noted dryly, making his brother supress a snort. If that was the case he’d have to hire another merchant to open a shop in their compound and he wasn’t looking forward to that. Besides, the silence worried him. It was way too quiet for so many people coming together. He made his way into the hall, taking his seat in front of the elders, Izuna as his right hand and co-leader next to him.

“The meeting is started”, he declared, and it didn’t even take three seconds for Hotaka to step forward. Madara supressed the urge to press his lips together. Hotaka had always gone against him whenever possible, being supported by those who strode after Tajima’s traditional ways instead of the new route he had decided to seek out for the clan. Behind him, he had gathered around a dozen Uchiha, each of them sharing his stale values of times that were better off forgotten. This was bound to be a long and unpleasant day.

“I do not think you are suitable to be clan-leader any longer, Madara”, he stated without premise, making the few other Uchiha who had gathered to discuss less… dire… subjects murmur.

“As I still am, it is Madara-sama for you”, the Uchiha leader noted, leaning back in his seat, his features both, unchanging and unimpressed. “And why is it, that you think I am no longer up to lead the clan?”

“Do not play coy!”, the middle-aged Uchiha barked. His hair was short and perfectly neat, the exact opposite of Madara’s unruly mane even he didn’t manage to tame most times. If he thought about it, Hotaka represented everything in this clan he had come to change. “You have forced us into this rotten village with the Senju and their bastard of a leader, to have him save your life from whatever illness has befallen you! You demand the clan to subdue to their biddings, to save yourself! Tajima-sama would have never-” “Tajima is dead”, Madara cut in. “And we agreed to leave the dead behind, when we moved on, in order to save the living.”

“*We* did not agree on anything!”

“Are you doubting us, Hotaka?”, Sarana asked. “The three of us agreed on this attempt of peace, alongside with both, Madara-sama and Izuna-sama. Just as Senju Hashirama did with his clan’s eldest. And if eldest and clan-head decide, the clan will follow, as they have only the clan’s best interest in mind.”

For a moment, the hall was silent. Yes, normally such great decisions would be discussed further with the clan members. But there was a reason for an unwritten rule within the Uchiha: Whenever elders and clan-head actually agreed on something (and they rarely ever did, was it the kind of tea to be served or battle strategies), that decision was what was best for the entire clan. To challenge this basically meant to challenge clan tradition and law, something rarely ever happened, as the Uchiha valued family and clan above all else. However… “I do not believe Madara…sama is fit to lead the clan any longer, as he is both, physically and mentally dependant on Senju Hashirama. The Uchiha will not suffer for his weakness. I have gathered fifteen clan-warriors who share my doubts.” As the named Uchiha stepped forward -all middle-aged, none of them of the younger generation that rose with Madara or him- Izuna’s eyes widened. He wouldn’t- “I hereby challenge you about the clan-leadership!”

Another moment passed, then Madara stood up from his seat. “I accept.”

Itsuko frowned. This had not happened in generations -and for reason. Such a challenge could be met with denial (meaning the current clan-head was willing to step back) or as had just happened, acceptance. If none was willing to back down, the only way to solve this conflict was by following the oldest law of the clan: Leader was to be the strongest. And the

only way to find out who truly was, was in a fight. Even considering such went deeply against all values of family that bound the Uchiha closer together than any other clan. Yet it seemed now, such values had been forsaken.

There was only a single training field that had already been carved out next to the village for sparring. It would have to do. If further space was needed, the fighters would simply have to burn down some more trees.

Silently, the group of Madara, Izuna, Hotaka (as well as his followers) and the elders made way to the field, an ever-growing bunch of concerned Uchiha behind them. As they had to make way through the main-gates, some Senju were bound to notice the strange convoy. Most of them decided to mind their own business -Uchiha were strange, after all- but a few silently stepped closer and as they weren't asked to stay back (a challenge of leadership was to be a public affair, so nobody would be able to distort the results), a handful of Senju decided to satisfy their curiosity.

"Hotaka-san", Itsuko stated, when they had finally made it to the open field, "You wished to challenge Madara-sama about the clan-leadership, as you think him no longer suitable. Have you changed your mind?"

"No."

Pity.

"Madara-sama, you accepted the challenge upon your leadership. Have you changed your mind?"

"No."

Both Uchiha faced each other, twenty meters of open space between them. Whoever won, would lead the clan. Such was law. Even though it hadn't been needed in generations.

"It is to be decided, then."

Not waiting for Itsuko -or anyone, really- to drag this out farther, Hotaka formed hand-signs, sending a crushing wall of fire right onto Madara, before forcing giant flaming fists into the burning mess. Madara hadn't yet moved out of harm's way, nor put up any counter. Whatever he was up to, Hotaka wouldn't let him continue. Even ill, Madara was too dangerous to be left with any room to take action in battle. He would have to force him to- out of red burning flames, something blue glowed, and Hotaka created another flaming wall crashing at Madara.

It was useless against the giant ribcage the Uchiha-leader had formed around himself, the bones extending further, forming a set of four arms with six fingers each hand, its face a snarling skull full of teeth. Madara's mass of hair was send flying in the waves of his chakra.

As the Uchiha-leader stepped forward, flesh began to form itself around the giant skeleton, the Susano'o growling upon its formation. With a wave of its hand, it simply shrugged off the

fireball cast onto it, its master on the ground not even touched by the heat.

Within the blink of an eye, Madara moved his Susano'o forwards, every attempt to stop him rendered useless at the nearly indestructible shell of his chakra. Roaring at his opponent, the Susano'o raised his left hand, before crushing the older Uchiha in a single swipe, leaving his bloody -but still living- figure motionless on the ground.

"The ways of the past have brought nothing but death and mourning. This village is our future and I will defend it at all costs."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Two idiots overeacting.

Chapter Notes

I really wanted to post this before tomorrow, as I'll be visiting friends for a few days. It's nearly 1am, I apologise for any occuring mistakes.

Also Happy Upcoming New Year to everyone.

“Madara!”

Of fucking course. Hashirama couldn’t even give him five seconds to clean this mess, get back to the gathering hall or… anything. Instead, he just slammed down next to the Uchiha in a cloud of dust, probably after running straight off from whatever he had been doing at the moment.

“I felt your chakra all the way across the village! Are you hurt? Here, let me take a look at-”

“Fuck off!” Did that stupid Senju even notice people were watching them? Hashirama had never gotten the concept of personal space as even most Uchiha had been bound to notice by now, but after Hotaka’s accusation of him being ‘physically and mentally dependant’ on him, he would rather make a point of- A heavy fit of coughing overran him, making his body convulse in pain for nearly half a minute, his lungs and throat feeling as though they had been ripped out from the inside. When he lowered the palm he had covered his mouth with, it was sprinkled with blood. “Damnit to hell”, he rasped, coughing once more and spitting a mouthful of blood to the ground.

He noticed some of his clans-men had drawn their weapons before he realised their reason, when he finally straightened again, to gain posture.

His back had been drawn to a warm, broad chest, as Hashirama had wrapped his arms around him, covering his throat and chest in the healing green glow of his hands. The Senju leader didn’t even seem to care about- “Don’t you try to run off now”, Hashirama warned, his… his *embrace* tightening and finally, his burning lungs pained a little less, his throat soothed and he forced his eyes to open again, as they attempted to flutter shut from relief. “You were getting better the last days, but now your alveoli are severely strained, some have burst in

stress. That's where the bleeding hails from." He could feel the Senju frowning behind him. "Actually, your whole body is stressed out, even though your lungs are worst. What have you done?! Didn't we agree to stay out of sparring until you were at least-" "Shut it, you moron", Madara groaned, before once again forcing his eyes to stay opened, as the warmth from Hashirama's palms seemed to seep into his very soul. "I had to set priorities."

Silently, the Uchiha put away their weapons, simply watching their clan-head and the Senju leader in the middle of the training-field, as did the few Senju who had come to watch the battle that never really was one. A few feet away, Hashirama frowned. "Nothing is worth more than your life and health", he declared, making a lot of Uchiha and some Senju eyebrows rise.

"This village is", Madara stated, finally stepping away from Hashirama, missing the warm, healing chakra instantly. "And it would have been hard to obtain it with Hotaka being clan-head."

"Oh." Only now, Hashirama noticed the bloody Uchiha at the ground, finally clicking the pieces together, as his clan's customs didn't differ *that* much from the Uchiha's. "Do you want… me to heal him?" For the very first time since Madara knew him -and that was a *lot* of time- Hashirama sounded hesitant, nearly unwilling to treat someone. However; before he was able to answer, Makoto rose to speak. "You shall not. He has chosen to challenge Madara-sama's leadership out of his own will. Now, he has to face the consequences for daring to."

Hashirama nodded without even arguing -another first- and faced his friend again. "Come on. Let's take you to bed, I can take better care of you there."

Without even waiting, he picked Madara up, disappearing right to his house, ignoring his poor victim's wheeze and glowing red cheeks.

Left behind, Izuna blinked in disbelief. "That Senju didn't just say that, did he?"

"I'm afraid he did", Makoto huffed. "And he doesn't even get it. Kami, grand us patience, for we have blockheads for leaders."

"How can he even be related to Tobirama-sama?", a blonde Senju wondered about his leader, making an Uchiha snort. "He didn't have any space left for brain with all these brawls, therefore his brother got Hashirama-sama's part, too."

"That seems way too likely", another Senju-kunoichi mumbled, shaking her head. She knew how much their leader wished this village to come to fruition. But it needed two parts for this to work out and one could never be certain about Uchiha Madara, as he was nothing if not an obscure man. Now, however…

"I really need that game of Shogi now", Sarana grumbled. "Someone pick up Hotaka. I'm going to be late for my match at Hibiko's."

“And then he summoned a demon, Hitomi says she’s never felt that much raw chakra before, smashed that other Uchiha right into the ground and said he’d protect the village with his life!”

The teen’s father, a middle-aged Senju with light brown hair beginning to silver out at the temples, hummed at his son, who apparently was way too excited for dinner, as his plate remained untouched. “It seems, that Madara-fella really wants the village to work out.”

“I wish I had been there! It’s just as Hashirama-sama said when we moved in: With the Uchiha at our side, no clan will dare to challenge us!” The boy hopped off his chair, without even touching his food. “I need to tell Katashi, I promised him! I’ll have dinner with them!” Without even waiting for an answer, the boy ran straight off, making his father sigh. “I have the feeling, that Uchiha-leader will be topic of conversation for a while.”

His wife smiled encouragingly, or at least as much as was possible with the large scar on her right cheek. “Still, it’s soothing to know the village doesn’t rest solely on Hashirama-sama’s shoulders.”

Her husband nodded, taking a sip of tea. “I had a lot of doubts about him”, he admitted freely. “I still do. But at least he seems to protect the village as much as Hashirama-sama does.”

Kaede stood, putting their son’s neglected plat into the fridge. “There they are”, she noted, making her husband get up in order to watch the two clan-leaders walk down the street side by side. Hashirama said something, gesticulating widely, a large smile on his face, making others bound to feel happy, too. He was talking rapidly, and even though both Senju watching knew he was light-hearted by nature, his very soul seemed to seep happiness right now.

At least, until the Uchiha-leader said something, a single eyebrow lifted, making Hashirama slam face-first into the ground, a cloud of misery raining down on him.

The Uchiha was half a head shorter than him (even though his mountain of hair nearly made up for that), his figure noticeably slimmer than Hashirama’s. Both of them knew it made him no less mighty on the battlefield, yet it seemed strange as the downed Senju got up again, now laughing, hugging the man he was supposed to be mortal enemies with just a few weeks ago, only to set him down and scurry about him, as Madara coughed heavily into his hand. They all knew the Uchiha leader was unwell, it was no secret (or if, a very poor attempt at one) that Hashirama tried his very best to heal the Uchiha of whatever sickness had come upon him.

In disbelief more than surprise both Senju watched, as their leader wrapped his fingers around the Uchiha’s pale throat, covering it with the glowing green chakra of healing he was famous for… and the raven let him. Not even showing an ounce of discomfort, he let Hashirama touch his weakest spot, nothing but white skin between their leader’s fingers and his carotid artery.

A few moments later, the two of them walked on, as if nothing had ever happened.

“It took a month for you to let me even attempt to touch your face and we’re both Senju”, the dark-haired man complained, making his wife chuckle. “You are nowhere as charming as

Hashirama-sama. Besides, I doubt they have known each other for merely these few weeks."

Her husband rose an eyebrow. "Are you referring to the rumours? I thought those were cast amongst Uchiha only."

Kaede shook her head, watching the two leaders disappear behind a tree. "Do you know some say they were children when they met first and dreamed about building a village together? When they discovered they were of enemy-clans, they were forced apart but even as clan-heads, they never truly fought each other."

"Rumours", her husband declined. They weren't worth listening to. However… "That golem Hashirama-sama summoned, when Fukito and Masaru attempted to slay Madara-san. He has never used it on the battlefield before."

"And I have never seen any kind of glowing demon with the Uchiha either", she stated, before shrugging. "Who knows. We will never find out; I somehow believe they'll keep that secret. But at least we know Madara-san defends the village as much as Hashirama-sama."

Smiling, Hashirama watched Senju and Uchiha working together to finish the main-building of the childrens' academy. It wasn't much yet, a few classrooms, a training field, a small auditorium. They would continue with a kitchen and a canteen, so the children could have lunch at noon without having to bring their own or run home. Hibiko and Akiyama had come to take a look as well, even though the old kunoichi had some trouble with arthritis nagging her over the last days.

"We'll need to be careful considering the future teachers", Tobirama stated. He was standing at his brother's side, watching the last efforts to finish the entrance. "I don't want to prefer younger shinobi of either clan, but the more experienced ones tend to rely on old routes too much."

Hashirama nodded. Physical punishment was something he had come to experience himself more than once. From this school, it would be banned rigorously. No child would have to fear pain from not agreeing to their teachers' ways. And above all, they needed people who believed in their still nameless village. Who believed in the unity of their clans, in the good it would bring forth, and not stir up old grudges or attempt to influence students the wrong way.

"Do you have someone in mind already?", he asked, making his younger brother frown. "I am not close enough to any Uchiha to be able to judge", he stated. "From our clan, I was thinking of Daruzo, Fushito, or Nashimi."

"With Fushito, we'd have at least one experienced shinobi amongst them", Hashirama noted. Fresh blood was always doing good, but one needed a centre for it. A group of nothing but youngsters was screaming for chaos. "I'll ask Madara about qualified Uchiha. And when the teams are formed, we'll need leaders for them."

"We shouldn't pounder too much about that, as long as we don't even have set the basics", Tobirama cautioned, arms crossed. "I'd rather-" "Hashirama!" The younger Senju turned

around, as Izuna appeared next to them, probably from above the rooves. “Madara is ill. His fever has risen since yesterday evening, and he can’t breathe properly. I think-”

With a gush of air, Hashirama was gone, leaving the rest of them behind.

Izuna blinked. “Well… That was fast.”

“You can’t just tell him Madara has fallen ill and not expect him to overact”, Tobirama stated, not knowing how he felt about it. In the end, he went for unnerved.

Hibiko huffed. “Didn’t even see us off. Such a churn.”

“Do you think they’ll get down to it before we’re out cold, watching the grass grow from below?”, Akiyama asked, fishing a small bottle of sake out of nowhere.

Tobirama frowned at the eldest. Firstly, he should oppose drinking at his age. Second… “Get down to what?”

Hibiko grabbed her fellow elder’s bottle, taking a much needed gulp. “They’re all blind around us, morons everywhere. Expect for these old Uchiha bastards. At least someone who gets what is shoved right in our faces.”

“One day, they will.” Akiyama took back his liquor, “And then we’ll be dead and they’ll wish they were as well, so they don’t have to see any of it.”

If Hashirama heard any of it, he didn’t care. Instead, he bolted to the Uchiha leader’s house, not even bothering with knocking. If nothing else, he did at least have the decency to take off his shoes before making way upstairs to Madara’s bedroom and entering right away. “Izuna, I told you, I’ll be better tomorrow”, the Uchiha rasped, having wrapped himself in three blankets, sweating and shivering simultaneously. Sluggishly, he lifted his head to tell his brother off and- “Don’t you dare to be difficult now”, Hashirama ordered, going on his knees and carefully stroking away a few strands of hair sticking to Madara’s forehead. Carefully, he worked a hand under the cocoon of blankets and rested it on the Uchiha’s chest, before starting to radiate healing chakra.

“Pneumonia”, he stated. “We were almost done with the infection a few days ago. You have to have gotten worse overnight. What happened?” Carefully, he got closer to the cocoon of blankets that was supposed to be his best friend and lowered his other hand on a sweaty forehead to take lower the fever. He had been positive they had dogged that bullet, even though Madara’s lungs had suffered severely with his fight yesterday afternoon.

“The Susano’o happened”, the raven rasped, coughing and wincing at the immediate pain it caused. “Its summoning stresses the body and drains massive amounts of chakra for the sake of nearly indestructible armour and unstoppable battle-power.”

“Then why did you summon it? You could have defeated that man without! You kept up with me even in your worst state, there is nobody who even comes close!” The pneumonia, he had to control the inflammation eating its way through the organ before it spread even further! Madara was too weak to withstand a full-out illness without suffering even more lasting

damage. He couldn't get rid of the mucus that had bacteria swimming in it to the brim. Maybe if he managed to isolate the infected tissue…

"Sometimes, you have to prove your point", Madara interrupted his thoughts, answering his question. Carefully, Hashirama helped him by lifting his back as another fit of coughing overcame him. Bad, much worse than yesterday. There was no arguing with Madara; his friend was way too proud to admit he might have overreacted. Damage control was in order. Carefully, he let his chakra seep into every corner of Madara's weakened lungs. Slowly, his healing energy closed around the infected area, cutting it off from the surrounding tissue. "Madara", he murmured. "You're in no state to allow a full-out pneumonia. So far, the infection has festered only in the lower left part, but your body is too weak to fight it from spreading all over your lungs. With the amount mucus still inside, that's only a matter of time. I have isolated the infested parts, and I could try treating those alone. I will probably be able to kill of the infesting bacteria, but I'll have to burn out all of them at once. That won't treat the cause of it, and it will be anything but pleasant, I fear."

Madara frowned. "Why didn't you do so before?", he asked, making the Senju groan. "Because it's useless since it does nothing to treat the main-reason for your state! It'll just strain your lungs even further. I wanted to get rid of the mucus, because that's the root of everything! But we can't let your pneumonia fester even further."

The Uchiha sighed wearily, the wet sound escaping neither of them. "Do it, then", he ordered, making Hashirama frown. He didn't even ask for details, considering what he was about to do was anything but painless and certainly a risk, even though one they had to take. "I trust you." The Senju stilled. Such a simply statement, three short words… And yet, they meant everything in their world. Madara trusted him. With his lungs, his health, his life. There was no greater gift a shinobi was able to offer.

Hashirama's palms lowered on the clam skin of the Uchiha's chest. "I'll start now."

Madara forced his body to relax, but as the pain set in, his attempts were in vain. The left half of his lungs felt as if it was stabbed with a burning iron over and over again. He grit his teeth as the pain got worse, hotter, as if part of his lungs was burned straight out of his chest. "Hurry up, Senju", he grit out, long fingers clawing at his blankets. Hashirama didn't dare to look up, too focussed on his task. "I need to wipe out the bacteria. If I don't do so rigorously, it's in vain."

The Uchiha's breathing haltered for a moment, as his lungs seemed to cramp, nearly making Hashirama stop. "Breathe, Madara, breathe. It's going to be fine, you'll do fine, I promise. I am nearly done with the first layer, I will need some more time."

Dragging in a shuddering breath through grit teeth, he forced his lungs to fill, making blinding pain wash over his body. He counted to five, before releasing his breath. He was no stranger to pain, no shinobi was, but this was neigh unbearable. He felt the edges of his vision darken when his chest felt as if it was ripped apart from the inside, causing his giving out body to fall back at the futon. "Shit!" Hashirama's voice made him focus again. "Stay with me, don't black out, you can't control your breathing if you're unconscious! I'm sorry, Madara, so, so sorry! Stay with me, focus on me!"

“Don’t tell me what to do”, he gasped, nearly biting his tongue and cursing himself for speaking. His muscles cramped, he would surely bite it off.

“That’s the spirit”, Hashirama praised, forcing himself to work even faster. Madara wouldn’t be able to stay conscious any longer; the pain had to be unbearable. He had been forced to burn some tissue that had been beyond saving, it had been infected since he started treating Madara and would have only started festering anew. There would remain some scars but those were neat and carefully mended, impacting the breathing as little as possible. He was almost done, working on the last layer of infected flesh that had eaten itself deep into Madara’s lungs. His chakra burned through every cell, killed all bacteria in its way, leaving nothing but Madara’s own pulmonary tissue. Whatever the Susano’o he had summoned did to his body, the impact was grave as he still found microscopic bleedings even though he had treated his friend right after the incident yesterday.

“I’m done”, he finally breathed out, marking the last words Madara heard before he was surrounded by darkness.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Madara+Head=Brains
Hashirama+Head=Slightly less Brains

Chapter Notes

Well... You already know English isn't my mothertongue and I'm deeply sorry for any occuring mistakes. I know it lessens the reading-fun...
If any of you is willing to Beta-read this story, I'd be glad. If there's none, I'll just go on and do my best not to fuck up royally :)
Also sorry for this rather short chapter.

Madara felt good, way better than most days when he woke up. But since he was used to feeling like shit, that didn't mean too much. The sun warmed his face, its rays indicating it was shortly after noon. Hashirama was nowhere to be seen but he could feel the nearly infinity mass of his chakra in the kitchen downstairs, right next to Izuna's and… He frowned. Tobirama's? Did his house turn into a Senju dwelling of some sorts?

Carefully, he got up from his futon and straightened his yukata as half of his chest was exposed due to Hashirama's treatment earlier, before making his way downstairs. He arrived just in time to hear Hashirama decline "- won't do that. It's not just my village, it's always been me and- Madara!" The Senju leader was the first to notice him, sitting on the kitchen table with both, his own and Madara's younger brother, a pot of tea and a scroll on the table between them. "How are you feeling?"

"Better." The Uchiha's eyes narrowed. "What's going on here?"

"The Daimyo replied to your letter", Izuna explained, nodding towards the scroll. "He wants to meet up with the clan-leaders as soon as possible to debate about the village leadership."

Madara frowned. First, it took him weeks to reply, and then everyone was supposed to meet with him this instant? What was the man thinking? That he owned the whole place? Yeah, probably exactly that. "We can't leave now", Hashirama interrupted his thoughts. "You're not well enough to travel that long, especially after this morning. If you're not careful, the infection might return right away and I don't want to have to beat another case of pneumonia"

“We cannot wait until Madara gets better, not if it could take weeks”, Tobirama cut in, crossing his arms. “If we deny his invitation, he might cut us off from future support and we can’t live without contracts and money.”

“We aren’t denying him, we’re simply delaying”, Hashirama noted, making his brother huff. “And you think he’ll see the difference?”

Madara helped himself to a cup of tea, before taking a seat between Izuna and Hashirama, carefully sipping the steaming drink. So, this was what they were on about. He wasn’t up to travel all the way across fire-country and back in his state and he was very aware of that. However, he didn’t know what all this fuss was about. Why didn’t they just- “What is the Daimyo supposed to think if he asks for the clan leaders -and, even more specific, about the village’s future leaders- and two Senju show up? The Uchiha take pride in this village because both of our clans are equal. There’s no equality in two Senju leaving to negotiate with the Daimyo about the village’s future while the Uchiha are left behind.”

Hashirama nodded. “You’re right, Izuna. That is why I want to wait. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a week or a month, Madara *will* get better. And as soon as that’s the case, we’ll leave.”

“There might be no reason to leave anymore, if we wait that long”, Tobirama stated, making the younger Uchiha frown. “There’s no way you and Hashirama going alone won’t cause the Uchiha to get irritate”, he countered. “Don’t forget we forged this village *together*.”

Madara took another sip of his tea, before sighing. Was everyone in here blind for the tree in midst of the forest? He wouldn’t put it past Hashirama, but Izuna at least was supposed to be smarter than that. Tobirama, too, for that matter. The man had gotten his older brother’s missing brains, after all. “We can’t let Hashirama leave alone, he’ll fuck up”, the Uchiha leader stated, making the older Senju’s face slam onto the table. Unimpressed, Madara took another sip, before blowing gently on his tea to cool the surface. “We can’t let Hashirama and Izuna leave either, since someone needs to temper down that moron, in case he wants to sign up his soul for a piece of cake. If it’s an Uchiha who does so, it’ll do both, undercut Hashirama’s authority as the leader of the Senju clan and make the Uchiha appear in a bad light. We should prevent that.” Hashirama opened his mouth to protest -he wouldn’t be too giving! It was about their village after all!- but Madara went on, ignoring his friend without a hint of remorse. “That leaves us with only one possibility: As the leader of the Senju, Hashirama will meet with the Daimyo. Tobirama, you’ll accompany him, so he doesn’t fuck up royally. Izuna, you’ll represent the Uchiha at his meeting. Unlike someone else in here, you don’t need a babysitter, so you’ll speak for all of us.”

For a while, the three of them were silent, considering Madara’s suggestion, whereas the Uchiha simply drank up his tea. This solution was both, the easiest and best one to approach their problem and he was very aware of that. “Aniki…” He looked up to his younger brother. “I’m not clan-head. It would be uncalled for, if I went.”

Madara chuckled, leaning back in his chair. “What do you think would happen, if my health was good enough and Hashirama and I went? It’d be my job to talk him out of all that bullshit he’ll come up with. Tobirama can do so without causing further problems. And besides”, he shrugged, “It’s not like I led the clan on my own. You did just as much. And

don’t forget, without you, the village wouldn’t even exist. It’s only just if you’re the one to go.”

Hashirama frowned. “I don’t like the idea of leaving you behind”, he confessed.

“And I don’t like the idea of you even opening your mouth during those negations, but we can’t have it all, can we”, Madara shot back mercilessly, making the older Senju slump in his chair, murmuring about everyone around him being mean. “I survived more than twenty years without you, I’ll get by.”

“I’m still worried”, Hashirama mumbled, watching his best friend with a pout.

“In that case you’d better worry about your tongue because I’ll rip it right off if you don’t shut the fuck up”, Madara growled, turning to Tobirama. “Make sure that idiot doesn’t sneak back halfway across fire-country.”

It was strange somehow, walking through the village without Hashirama at his side. The stupid Senju had insisted on waiting to the next morning before leaving, making sure to wait one night in case Madara’s condition got worse again.

Unable to tell him off (no, not because he was reluctant to do so, but because Hashirama right out *refused* to leave), Madara had kicked out the Senju as soon as he woke up in the morning. Not even an hour later, the two Senju leaders and Izuna had departed.

“Madara-sama!”

He looked down on a small Senju-boy, who flinched as his eyes met the Uchiha leader’s piercing gaze but didn’t back down. Well, not that much at least. “What is it, boy?”, he asked. Did something happen? But it would be more likely for the kid to ask an adult Senju for help in that case. However, the child finally made up his mind, eyes squeezed shut, and blurted: “Ihopeyouarefeelingbetter.”

Madara blinked, unable to detangle the rush of words, before frowning. The kid -he might be seven, maybe eight- took a deep breath, before trying again. “Are you feeling better? I hope you’re feeling better. Mom says you’ll protect the village, so we don’t have to fight anymore. Yesterday Kumiko, Hatishi, Hiki and I played hide and seek. I had to fight Hatishi once, you know, because he’s an Uchiha… I don’t want to fight with him again, he says we’re friends now. Mom says if you hadn’t protected the village, we would’ve had to fight again, because-” He stopped, finally catching up to his rush of words, cheeks starting to redden in embarrassment, as the ground suddenly seemed way more interesting than it had any right to be.

Carefully, Madara crouched down, to be on eye-level with the boy. “I’m feeling better”, he confirmed. “This village is the future of our clans and both, Hashirama and I will protect it.”

Suddenly, the boy grinned at him, blue eyes sparkling. “Awesome!”

And with that, the child ran off, disappearing somewhere between the houses, leaving the Uchiha behind. He shook his head. Children… but it wasn't as though he had much time to think about it anyway. The Senju elders had asked to meet him, because this morning -just a few hours after Hashirama, Tobirama and Izuna had left- a small pigeon had landed in front of Hashirama's door. The little bird had carried a single small scroll on its leg, addressed at the leaders of the Uchiha and Senju clan. Since Hashirama was gone, the two Senju elders would stand in his place.

Madara walked past some gardens (the Senju had spread like a plaque, each garden at least thrice as big as the actual house), before getting to the last one. Senju in general required a lot of space and their leader was even worse. Whereas common people grew herbs in their gardens or maybe had some chickens, Hashirama grew a fucking forest. A bunch of cherry-trees, their bright leaves glowing in the sun, alongside those which would certainly carry peaches and pears next autumn. Instead of a beet for herbs, the fucking place was basically covered in flowers. Roses, tulips, daisies, marigold… You name it, it was there, happily blooming despite the fact it was way too early in the year for such flowers. Nevertheless, they bloomed in a sea of colours, giving zero fucks about the cold and lack of sun. He could even hear some birds chirp, easily making out a wren in between them. Those were always early. In the middle of the garden, a spacious lake glittered in the sun, a few Koi fish happily soaking up the warmth instead of hiding in the shadow of the single red acorn growing next to the water. The whole place radiated the essence of Hashirama himself: Life. Not a single gloomy place, a single dead patch of grass, a single leaf fallen from any tree. Hashirama's joy for living had seemed to seep into every plant.

Didn't change the fact that Hashirama probably took up more space than the Daimyo he was currently visiting.

Madara huffed quietly. Hashirama had always been joyous, despite the circumstances forced upon him. He had made a choice very early in life, choosing gentleness and life instead of the destruction he could easily havoc amongst it. It wasn't that he was too weak or too cowardly to use his powers to protect what he held dear. He simply cherished life in any form, even it happened to be an Uchiha he was supposed to be enemies with. Madara sighed. Most likely, Hashirama's wilfully made decision for creation instead of an inability of destruction was what he had come to lo- "Are you going to gawk at his garden all day? The tea's getting cold!"

Madara blinked, slowly turning to Hibiko who was glaring at him from the porch. "I'm coming", he muttered, slowly turning around to enter Hashirama's house, leaving his shoes at the entrance. On the carefully cut bonsai in the living room (because of course Hashirama had a perfectly trimmed bonsai tree in his living room) a small dove was sitting, feathers patched grey with white sprinkles. It was probably waiting for them to write an answer to whoever's letter it had delivered.

He took a seat and Akiyama handed him the small scroll, still neatly tied with a white ribbon. On its back, his and Hashirama's name had carefully been written.

He loosened the fabric, gently opening the small scroll, before squinting. His sight was still quite acceptable, however; tiny letters such as these were hard to read and blurred together

the longer he stared at them. Thankfully, the letter was rather short and after reading it, he passed it back to Akiyama, who carefully put it down after reading alongside with Hibiko.

The Uchiha leaned back in his seat. “I assume one of you controls the bird.”

The pigeon fluttered from its place to take a seat on the table, cooing once. Madara nodded. The Yamanaka were way ahead of any other clan in matters of mind and the controlling of such, be it an opponent’s in battle or a simple carrier pigeon. Anyway, it would make things easier.

“The Yamanaka are the first ones to ask for an alliance, therefore we have neither any kind of experience or formalities prepared. As you should be aware of by now, Hashirama is currently conducting negotiations with the Daimyo. I have decided to stay behind to protect the village in case of emergency.” That was not at all the reason he had stayed in the village, but he had to feed the Yamanaka something that didn’t include him admitting his health was a fucking mess and he didn’t put it past his body to give out during the journey. Also, better not give them ideas about the village being unprotected during Hashirama’s trip. “I will not make such grave decisions as the Yamanaka joining the village with Hashirama being absent, since I know he wouldn’t do the other way around as well. However; while he is gone, his clan’s elders will speak for him.”

The pigeon turned around as to face the two elders. Hibiko huffed. “You know, back in our glory time, instead of this, we would have had the guts to come over ourselves.”

Akiyama sighed. “Don’t start again. Remember what happened when Guseko decided to- Oh, never mind, neither of you young people need to hear that. Anyway… Neither of us can speak for Hashirama-sama, however; I doubt he would be opposed to further negotiations considering the Yamanaka joining our village.”

“Just come back next week”, Hibiko grumbled. “And make sure to do so in person. Talking to birds makes me feel like a stupid old hag.”

Madara refused to give in to the impulse to pinch the bridge of his nose. Elders were a lot to deal with, no matter their clan. Most likely because they could give a fuck about basically anything since they would be dead sooner rather than later. “Next week sounds acceptable”, he agreed in an attempt to prevent further bickering.

Deeming the meeting over, Madara opened a window and the pigeon flew off, back to the Yamanaka where it would hopefully get food and some pets.

Shutting the window behind the bird, he took a sat again. “Shall we prepare negotiations with the Yamanaka then?”, he asked, as everyone knew Hashirama was terrible at those. The elders would surely be less giving and they would keep in mind both, their clan’s and the village’s best interest.

Hibiko drank up her tea. “You’ll do great”, she told him and without another word, the two elders walked straight out of the door, leaving him alone. Madara blinked. Did he just get ditched?

The front door fell shut.

He just got ditched.

Groaning, he got up to search for some paper and ink in an attempt to write down the essentials of their basis for negation. He would have to hammer those in Hashirama's wooden brain before next week.

Two hours later and stuck in more details than he'd thought possible, he had eaten all of Hashirama's remaining eggs and cheese in form of an omelette and was about to finish his cherry juice.

He was just scratching out his former thoughts -whether the Yamanaka would stay allied to the Senju or the Uchiha in case the village ever split up had turned out to be irrelevant at this point- when the ground shook as if something unbelievable heavy had just slammed on it. Right after the first impact, another followed and a scream emerging from the valley north of the village tore across the peaceful day, loud enough to be heard for miles. A third impact and his glass of cherry juice fell over, the red liquid soaking the paper.

Madara got up.

"Fucking shit."

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Basically a fanfic to a fanfic written to a fanfic. Suck on that, Inception.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dashing out of the front door, Madara was greeted by a bunch of Senju. “Madara-sama!”

He gave a short nod in acknowledgement. “Toka”, he answered. “Any information?”

Hashirama’s cousin shook her head. “None.”

Another scream shook the village and Madara cast out his senses, cursing right after. “Whatever it is, it’s big. Nearly as much chakra as Hashirama and approaching fast, from the north.” By now, the sensors of his own clan had sought him out, waiting for orders. “Fushito, Nanashi, Akanaru, Hitabi! You follow me. Tashimi, everyone else is to form defence lines! Naboru takes over command as long as I’m gone. Toka, pick some shinobi to accompany us, the rest will fight alongside the remaining Uchiha to defend the village.”

Toka nodded once, ordering two Senju to follow them, whereas the rest of them were to defend the village alongside the Uchiha.

“Let’s go”, Madara bellowed, jumping off like a crossbow being fired. Three Senju and four Uchiha followed right after, heading towards the valley north of their village.

Somewhere all the way across Fire-Country, Hashirama flinched. He missed a step, nearly stumbling down from the tree he had just been jumping on, coming to a rather inelegant hold.

“Anija!” Tobirama stopped on a branch of the next tree, facing his older brother. “What are you doing?”

Hashirama blinked, turning around and looking in the direction of the village they had left nearly half a day ago. “I don’t know… Just…” “Just?”, Tobirama parroted, eyes narrowing. “Just a feeling”, Hashirama muttered, turning fully around. “Maybe we should…”

Tobirama frowned. While he was a rather down-to-earth man (even though some claimed that to be an understatement), Hashirama did always have a particular way of being able to trust his guts. More often than not, it had proven to be right. It was unwise to ignore his brother’s instinct.

“Aniki is still at the village”, Izuna pointed out. “There’s nothing ever been able to defeat him. Well, except you that one time but that was due to his illness. But I’m pretty sure if we return now due to anything short of the upcoming apocalypse, he’ll skin you alive.”

For a moment, Hashirama wondered if he would be able to regrow the skin on his naked flesh, before shuddering. Not all presumptions needed to be tested. “Let’s hurry up”, he finally muttered. “The sooner we arrive, the sooner we will be back in the village.”

Madara grit his teeth.

Bad.

Kami, this was bad.

Another scream cut into his eardrums and the ground shook, as the giant beast took a step forward.

Behind him, he could hear one of his shinobi swallow, but none of them retreated upon the raging beast tearing its way across the valley in front of them. Four out of its nine tails clobbered down, crumbling stone and naked earth, its front paws tearing apart whatever remained. Considering the path of destruction behind it, the nine-tailed beast was heading right at their village.

“Kyuubi!” Madara’s voice echoed from the cliff they were standing on. “Cease your path! We have no quarrel with you and do not wish for a fight!”

The giant fox turned towards him, eyes blood red, and another scream shook the very ground he stood on, making the rock beneath his feet shiver. Its gaze seemed to be fastened onto him, yet at the same time went right through. Then, the Bijuu opened its jaws and Madara’s eyes widened as he felt the amount of raw chakra it was forming. He dashed forward, leaping off the edge in a powerful jolt and within the blink of an eye, summoned his Susano’o around him.

Pain erupted in his body, feeling as though he was being burned alive, the flames seeming to eat away his flesh, as the incredible mass of his chakra crashed right onto the raging fox, crushing it to the ground. The still forming chakra bomb in its maw exploded, splintering the ground. Madara let his Susano’o jump back, the force crushing the Kyuubi farther into the ground. However, after no more than a second, it rose to its hind legs, screaming at Madara, before leaping on his opponent with a speed uncalled for something this large, crushing the Susano’o right into the cliffs behind it.

The charka construct roared with rage as it freed itself from the now crumbling stone and the Nine Tails opened its maw again, gathering masses of chakra. Madara steered his Susano’o forward, aiming a kick at its jaws to prevent the attack that would surely follow. The Kyuubi however used his unsafe footing, kicking the sole leg the chakra constructed rested upon and forced it to crash down. Before he could get up again, Madara felt a giant maw closing onto

his battle avatar's arm, ripping it off. He used the remaining arm to punch straight at the Kyuubi's sensitive nose, forcing it to let go and made his Susano'o jump to its feet.

This wouldn't do. Even in this form, his avatar would be unable to put up a fight for long. He would need protection for the chakra-flesh he had formed around him, as the Nine Tail's teeth would just continue to rip it into pieces.

"Retreat to the valley's edge", he commanded, not facing the shinobi still standing on the cliff above them. Even though they were the clans' mightiest warriors (after the leaders and their little brothers, that is), they would be crushed right away. "Try to eliminate any attacks leaving the valley! I don't know if I can nullify all of them!"

"Madara-sama! This is madness!" Toka. Of course, now that Hashirama wasn't there to annoy the shit out of him, his cousin would take on the job. "Retreat! Not even… this… can't withstand a Bijuu!"

"That is because I am not done yet!", the Uchiha leader bellowed. The fox apparently had recovered from nearly having its nose crushed and aimed another piecing scream at him. His hands tightened into fists, as he forced his chakra to compact even further, his Susano'o nearly feasting on his chakra reserves, until he could feel there was nothing more to accomplish, as he had the ultimate weapon at his bidding.

Its Master residing in the single gem on his Susano'o's forehead, the armour round him nigh indestructible, the giant battle avatar drew its sword and its armour rattled as the beast in front of it screamed once again.

"I will not let you wrack havoc on our village", Madara stated. "Cease your path and leave, I will not let you pass."

Instead of an answer, the giant fox leapt at him.

The hilt of his Susano'o's sword rammed into the Kyuubi's lower jaw from below, crashing it shut and eliminating another growing chakra bomb.

Inside the safety of his chakra Madara coughed, cursing at the blood he spat out. His sight was blurring, his lungs clenched. Madara could feel his body slowly starting give out. The pressure of summoning these giant masses of his chakra upon his (rather poor, as he was finally able to admit) physique was immense and he was very aware his weakened state didn't make things easier.

However, the Kyuubi wasn't that much better off. Its left hind leg was bleeding where a chakra-formed sword had cut clean into his hamstring muscle before it had been stopped by three tails. Two of its claws had been ripped out, making the right front paw bleed, as well as one of its ears.

Once again, the Nine Tails screamed at him and Madara frowned. It had nearly sounded like - he let his Susano'o outstep an attack- like a name… *"Drah!"*

He leaped forward, knocking the beast right into another cliff. Without hesitating, one of its tails shot upwards, grabbing the kunoichi closest to him -one of the Senju, even though not Toka- and proceeding to crush her into the valley scarred from their fight. The force behind it would be great enough to at least shatter bones, leaving her open to be killed within a moment.

The Susano'o leapt forward, catching the Senju mid-air. However; before he was able to turn around, the Kyuubi had jumped out of the valley in a single leap, barrelling right towards the village, not minding the amount of blood it was losing due to its injuries.

"Toka!", he yelled, tossing the currently unconscious Senju to her, before forcing his Susano'o to let go of the sword-sheaths and instead transforming the additional pair of hands to the wings they actually were, flinging the chakra construct upwards, heading after the raging beast.

However, his Susano'o was created for destruction -brutal, all-consuming nullification- rather than speed. He wouldn't get to the Kyuubi before it made path to the village. One of the chakra-creature's arms thrust out, sending one of its four swords flying towards the fleeing Nine Tails.

Screeching, the demon fox stopped as to avoid getting pierced by the giant weapon the same moment Madara let his Susano'o get down as close as possible. The village was a quarter mile away. He had to stop the fox from getting to it at all costs! Even though this close to the village, he had to take even more care wielding his blades to avoid collateral damage. He couldn't risk using their destructive capabilities.

"You will not pass!" His voice hollered across the field. "I will die before I let you!"

His Susano'o growled loudly, nearly yelling at its opponent.

Spitting out a mouthful of blood, Madara grit his teeth against the pain eating on him and turned his Susano'o's wings back into the additional pair of hands, regretting it a mere moment later, when two fox tails attempted to throw him off balance, forcing the large construct to leap above them to prevent crashing into the ground. The earth shook as it landed again, crushing the churned ground beneath its feet.

The Nine Tails opened its maw, creating another chakra bomb. The Susano'o's sword pierced the forming attack, slicing it in half.

Madara had outright forgotten how many attempted attacks at the village he had prevented at this point. He had to be so very careful wielding his swords, as every attack was capable of destroying the village and people he had sworn to protect. He just couldn't go all in and there was no way of pushing the beast back far enough for an open fight. Every time he tried, it would attempt outrunning him, making way to the village.

By now, he had difficulties distinguishing upcoming attacks. He was unable to make out their environment any longer, everything was just colours blurring together in the distance. The

Kyuubi's attacks only came into focus if it aimed them directly at him, right before they would find their target. However; they had become sloppy, slower, their aim off. The fox way barely able to stand on its hind legs any longer. Instead, it went to all fours, before leaping right at him, making his Susano'o stumble back from the force.

Madara punched the beast's stomach, making it scream once more as it tumbled back. *"Ih-Drah!"* Again… It nearly sounded like a name. Using the flat side of one of his remaining swords, Madara forced the already unsteady beast tumbling on its back, crashing onto the ground. The Susano'o jumped, its wings allowing it to gain more height… and the very moment the Kyuubi struggled to get back on its feet, Madara let his battle-avatar crash right onto its stomach, feet first. The very force compelled the fox into the ground, forming a crater beneath it.

Madara let the chakra-construct surrounding him leap back, preparing his swords to finally end this fight -he could barely make out the Kyuubi's outlines any longer, mostly relying on his sensory qualities by now- when the fox started to gag, stomach heaving from the blunt force it suffered by being hit with the Susano'o's full weight straight on. It lifted its head, heaving once more, before emptying its stomach. Gastric acid splashed on the ground, bits of flesh, and- he frowned. He couldn't see them, but there were clearly two shinobi. Their chakra signatures were strange, similar to the Kyuubi's but slightly off in a way he couldn't put to terms.

"Indra!", the Nine Tails screamed, apparently not being able to get up. "Brother! Kill them, brother! Kill them now!"

Already, he could feel the two shinobi make way back to the Kyuubi. Beyond logic, his guts told him letting them reach the demon fox would be fatal. He had to make sure they wouldn't, had to be certain there would be nothing left of them, of whatever strange chakra they contained.

Nothing.

Nothing at all.

Black flames surrounded the two strangers and he could feel them eat away their skin, flesh and bones, even the very chakra within them until not even ashes remained.

"Would you cut it down", Tobirama bellowed, making his older brother slow down the slightest bit in order for his two comrades to close up.

"I have a bad feeling", he muttered. "We'd better hurry back."

"If this is *not* hurrying to you, I don't know what is", Izuna stated. Both, him and Tobirama had trouble keeping up with the Senju leader's pace even though apparently, he was able to go even faster.

Hashirama shook his head, the twisted feeling getting worse. “I shouldn’t have gone. It wasn’t worth the travel anyway…”

Trees blurring around them, Tobirama sighed next to his brother. Yes, the Daimyo would have indeed preferred to negotiate some kind of proper leader of their people. But some things simply hadn’t been due yet in their fledging village and thus, the three of them had to do. Nothing had been formally contracted yet, since for that they would need to name an official head of their village and even though it was more than likely Hashirama would take that place, he had right out refused to act as one without having been elected yet.

And Ah, elections… yet another sore topic, since the Daimyo would have preferred for them to simply name a leader instead of making their people choose one. However, in that matter, the three shinobi had shown to be unrelenting. The one who would be chosen by their people was to be village leader. And since none of them were at that point, there was only so much they could agree to.

Most important for them: They wouldn’t be cut off future contracts. The land they had their village built on might be located in Fire-Country, but ever since the war it had been considered shinobi territory (Hashirama had offered to buy the land; Tobirama had nearly whacked his head before telling the Daimyo that the forest had been no-man’s-land in generations and if he decided to change that, he would cause unrest not only amongst Senju and Uchiha but other shinobi clans as well).

Most important for the Daimyo: Neither Senju nor Uchiha held any interest in overthrowing the royal line, much less taking to ruling. They village however would remain independent.

There wasn’t so much more to talk about at that point (or rather: Not much more Tobirama would have his brother talk about), therefore they had stayed the night by courtesy and left by sunrise.

Hashirama hadn’t gotten an ounce of sleep all night.

“It could have gone better, but it certainly could have gone worse”, Izuna summed up their stay. “We even got dinner… and they had these hideous monkey-shaped napkin holders! I took one for Madara, he’ll *hate* it.”

Tobirama threw the Uchiha a quick glance. “You stole one of the Daimyo’s napkin holders?”

“I didn’t steal it, I just rented it”, Izuna informed him. “Forever, without payment.”

The younger Senju sighed. It seemed, even though Izuna was way more tactile than Madara or his own older brother, Uchiha in general came with a varying amount of madness. Probably a result of decades of inbreeding, he noted wryly.

By now, they had almost made it home, thanks to Hashirama’s sharp pace. They hadn’t even taken a break to pee (if any of them brought it forth, Hashirama would probably kindly ask them to hold back until they had arrived at the village) and Izuna’s stomach loudly demanded food. The three of them ignored it, as they would arrive in a few minutes. There was no reason to- “Kami!”

Finally closing up to Hashirama again, the two younger brothers were greeted by a picture of destruction. The valley north of their village had been utterly destroyed. Cliffs shattered, some of them crashed, trees ripped by their roots, earth churned up und scarred, rocks lager than houses thrown all the way into the forest.

“What *happened*?”, Izuna demanded, aghast. He didn’t get an answer as the three of them bolted off to the village. Right outside of it, an even more vicious battle had seemed have taken place, as the ground as scarred with craters. There was nothing left standing, not even the burnt grass beneath their feet. There was no way anyone- “Madara. *Madara!*” Without even bothering to wait for them, Hashirama darted off into the village. Tobirama and Izuna shared a look. Of course. Kami knew what happened to their village and everyone within but to Hashirama nothing mattered more than the Uchiha leader.

Following right after, the two of them arrived just as Hashirama knocked viciously on the door to the shared house of the Uchiha clan-heads. “Madara! Madara, open up! Are you alright? What happened?” -Mind the order he asked, Tobirama noted dryly- “Who was-” Before he was able to finish, the door flew open, revealing the Uchiha leader in a sloppily tied yukata.

“It’s the middle of the fucking night”, he hissed, glaring at Hashirama. “Stop waking the whole village, they haven’t had the best day anyway.”

“What happened?” The Senju leader stared at him. “You look horrible.”

“Why, *thank* you, Hashirama”, the raven drawled, before looking up to where Izuna and Tobirama were standing. “Get in”, he finally ordered, turning around and making way to the kitchen. His shoulder brushed the doorframe as he entered.

Taking off their shoes, the three of them decided to follow. When they got in, Madara was re-tying his yukata and Hashirama frowned. The kitchen was dark and when he turned on the light, Madara didn’t even blink from the sudden brightness, even though his eyes had always been sensitive. He took one of the three remaining seats on the kitchen table.

“I’ll make some tea”, Izuna sighed, the hot brew held always a certain amount of comfort. And somehow, he felt they needed it tonight.

No one broke the ice until the tea was finished steeping and Izuna put four cups on the table, filling each. When Madara took his own, his fingers carefully glided across the table until they met the cup.

“The village was attacked”, Madara finally confirmed their concerns, making the three of them stiffen. “It was dealt with and that’s all I’m going to say about the matter. It’s fuck o’clock in the morning and I’m deadly tired. Drink your tea and get out. Or sleep in the kitchen, I don’t care.”

Hashirama swallowed his questions, his concern now solely focussing on Madara. The Uchiha never would admit such a bagatelle as him being ‘tired’. At least if not attempting to hide something that was of actual concern.

Finally, the two Senju got up, making way to the main corridor leading to the door.

The floor was dark since Tobirama had switched off the light when he left it, as was his habit. Now, Izuna turned it on again. Without waiting for him to react, Hashirama took Madara's face in his hands, turning him right into the bright light on his left.

The Uchiha's pupils remained half-way opened in his dark irises, unchanged by the blinding of the light the Uchiha faced, his eyes unresponsive.

"You are blind", Hashirama whispered.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter involves everything I suck at writing: Political discussions and battle-scenes. Yes, I am a brilliant mind indeed and put all in one chapter to make sure it sucks even worse.

Before bashing me about Madara being weak in comparison to canon where he overpowered Kurama, please consider:
1. He is severely ill
2. He hasn't achieved the Eternal Mangekyou Sharingan

Thank you for the load of comments to the latest chapter! I joyed my ass off (and yeah that's an actual metaphor where I'm from).

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

In which Hashirama throws a heavy fit of PMS.

Chapter Notes

Thank you again for all those kudos and comments! They really keep me going.

I proofread the first three chapters during the weekend. Holy shit, so many obvious spelling mistakes... I'm kinda embarrassed ^^'
If you notice major mistakes, please don't hesitate to tell me. I will correct them as soon as possible.
However, I admit I only fully proofread chapters once or twice before posting. I could do more, to steer clear of some more mistakes, but then I'd take longer for updates. Let me know what you'd prefer :)

“Hashirama.”

The kitchen wall crumbled.

“Hashirama!”

The sheer power of chakra forced the walls to collapse; parts of the roof crashed down next to them. Even the non-sensors amongst their clans had woken up by now, if not alarmed by the boiling well of chakra, the sound of the crashing house of the Uchiha clanleaders was quite enough. A bunch of shinobi -both, Senju and Uchiha- arrived next to them in alarm, still clad in their nightwear.

“Get a fucking grip!”, Madara bellowed, as the rest of their house crashed around them. The shinobi around them swallowed, uncertain about how to react, facing this seemingly infinite amount of overwhelming chakra.

“Who?” Hashirama’s voice was dark and the amount of chakra radiating intensed even further, nearly crushing everyone around him -except for Madara around whom it seemed to wrap like a protective shield. The ground burst beneath Hashirama’s feet, making the shinobi around them stumble back. Twines wrapped around the Uchiha’s ankles. *“Who did this?”*

“Stop acting like a hellion!”, the Uchiha leader barked, crossing his arms. The surrounding shinobi watched him wary, uncertain how he remained unfazed in the face of such unbearable amounts of raging chakra, that nearly had them crashing into the last remaining walls. “And what does it matter? They’re dead anyway.”

“It matters because you are *blind!*”, Hashirama cried. “It matters because I wasn’t there, when you needed me the most! It matters because-” Hashirama grasped his shoulders, staring nearly desperately into his best friend’s unseeing eyes. “- It’s *my* fault!”

Still standing where the other side of the floor had been a few moments ago, Tobirama and Izuna looked at each other, before watching their older brothers again. What a mess… and while Izuna normally would be furious for Madara’s lost eyes, Hashirama’s reaction baffled even him.

Meanwhile, one of Madara’s slim eyebrows rose. “Oh, so you have been attacking the village? Good to know, you utter moron. Now, stop being a fucking failure! You ruined my house and-” A heavy coughing fit interrupted him, and he cursed, when he noticed the blood his lungs had been throwing up. His palm was covered in red. The herbs had supressed the fits, since he was very aware with Hashirama gone, there was nobody in the village able to help him.

Within a single moment, the raging chakra calmed and Hashirama’s warm palm had slipped under Madara’s yukata, resting on his chest. The other wandered from his shoulder to the side of his throat and he grit his teeth. Bad. Whatever Madara had done, it hadn’t just cost him his sight, but also worsened his health immensely. He was bleeding internally, especially his lungs had been suffering -as those were his weak spot anyway, they always took hits harder. The deeper his chakra seeped, the direr Madara’s condition seemed to become. His lungs might be worst, however; his entire organism was severely strained and Hashirama could detect three internal bleedings, as well as two that had stopped not even an hour ago. “You need to-”

“Indra?” The voice boomed across the village, echoing in the silence of the night. It haled from the other side, where the great forest was deepest. “Are you all right? Is this… is this Ashura with you?”

Madara threw his best friend a sour glance. “Thanks, dickhead”, he hissed, before rising his voice. “It’s alright. Go back to sleep. Ashura isn’t here, you have been dreaming!”

Hashirama’s mouth fell open. “Wha-”

“Shut your communion hole”, the Uchiha hissed once more, before coughing again and spitting a mouthful of blood to the ground. “I don’t want it to wake up again. Ask your stupid questions later. I’m tired as fuck and since you destroyed our house, Izuna and I are going to sleep in yours.”

“Madara-sama”, one of the surrounding Senju piped up, “Are you certain about this? We don’t know what it’ll be up to once it wakes up.”

The Uchiha leader shrugged. “Can’t be worse than yesterday”, he determined. “Let it sleep, I’ll deal with it in the morning. If your moron of a clanhead wouldn’t have thrown a fit, it wouldn’t have woken at all.”

“And what”, Tobirama finally cut in, sounding rather sour, “Is it we’re talking about? There’s a massive concentration of chakra in the south-western forest.”

Madara shrugged. “And that’s what we’re talking about”, he summoned, coughing up some more blood and finally setting Hashirama into motion. “Let’s get you to bed, I need to take care of you.”

The shinobi around them spluttered but Hashirama just carefully dragged the Uchiha leader along, to tow him onto his own futon -he’d just grow a bed for himself later. Despite being blind, Madara’s eyes watched him judgingly, as he wondered once again how he was friends with this idiot of a Senju.

Carefully, Hashirama went to work. Knitting up organic tissue, he sealed the inner wounds, slowly stopping the bleeding. Madara’s entire metabolism had severely suffered, his body had been strained to a molecular level. Slowly, he tried to soothe the damaged cells.

The Senju sighed. “Your lungs have worsened again.” At least, the mucus inside didn’t act up, but the small tears in his friend’s pulmonary tissue needed to be mended before they infected. One major bleeding -the one causing his blood coughs- had to be carefully closed, before he grasped Madara’s face. It still was a little too slim for his liking; Madara had lost weight again. He’d have to make effort for him to stay nourished in the upcoming weeks. But then, Madara’s weight had been a concern of his ever since the Uchiha had broken down on the battlefield. However, this wasn’t the main problem right now.

Carefully, his chakra seeped into the Uchiha’s eyes, trying to determine the damage. He had to find a way to undo it, to heal whatever had caused this much defect over such a short period of time.

Hashirama sucked air through his teeth. The retina had completely dissolved, the nerve cords to Madara’s eyes ruptured. The lenses in his eyes had basically melted. There was no way these eyes would ever be able to function again the way they were now.

“That’s the price for the Mangekyou Sharingan”, Madara informed him calmly. “If grands power but degenerates your eyesight. Besides, the massive chakra flow drains the body physically. It’s nothing but a trade: The sight of your eyes for the power within.”

Hashirama didn’t respond, instead he tried to fix his friend’s blind eyes, not even bothering how long it would take and just barely noticing when the front-door opened and Tobirama entered, Izuna and a futon he had burrowed next to him.

He didn’t know when he finally lowered his hands. He had attempted to re-grow the retina several times, but the tissue would just dissolve mere moments after he had fixed it, no matter how much chakra he infused or how fast he worked. His nerve cords just remained entirely unchanged. There was no way to get Madara’s eyes functioning again and the realisation made the supressed fury bubble up angrily.

His eyes raked across the Uchiha's sleeping features. He looked different when he slept. Peaceful, the lines on his face much less consuming. He looked younger by years. Beautiful. His father's words danced in his ears, the ones he'd said when Hashirama had started to let his hair grow. *Beauty is for the weak only.* Oh, how very wrong Butsuma had been. Madara was the mightiest fighter on any battlefield, the only one being able to keep up with him. At least he had been, until… He felt his chakra rise again and grit his teeth in a fight for it to behave. Madara had fallen asleep -he didn't even know when, just at some point during his treatment- and he wouldn't want to wake a sensor as sensitive him just because his chakra ran havoc once more.

Carefully, he retreated, drawing a bedframe from the wall next to his friend. Soft leaves making his rest comfortable, he could feel even more of them covering him, radiating a soothing warmth, attempting to calm his rage.

Dawn broke, when he finally fell asleep.

"Madara!"

He grabbed the Uchiha's elbow, as he stumbled over a branch in his way. Growling, Madara straightened himself again. Izuna and Tobirama wisely remained silent, as Hashirama offered to lead him, making Madara nearly spit in his face, as he snarled about being blind, not disabled. The three of them refrained from stating that in fact, he was both.

Since Madara refused to tell them who exactly had attacked the village during their trip -and everyone else, Senju and Uchiha alike, agreed it wasn't their place to talk about- the only way to find out was to do as the Uchiha had demanded: If they wanted to know what happened, he would show them.

"Do you want me to-" "No", Madara interrupted, declining whatever Hashirama had been up to. And it hurt. It *hurt*. Hashirama wondered how someone else's pain could cause himself this very much agony. As a healer, he wasn't unaccustomed to witnessing pain. However, this was something he found himself unable fight, as it clawed deeper into his heart every moment. *Left him alone. Blind. Your fault. Your fault.*

"The chakra source is getting stronger", Tobirama finally noted. It felt foul, overwhelmingly so. And most of all, it was strong. Nearly as strong as his older brother's and entirely disgusting.

Madara continued his path, expecting the others to follow him. After all, they were the ones who wanted to know. "Remember to keep your weapons sheathed", he reminded when they made it to a large rock prominence. Under it, protected by trees and rock, a giant body breathed heavily. Next to him, Tobirama and Izuna stiffened.

"That's a fucking Bijuu", Izuna stated, crossing his arms. "Aniki, whatever you did, just don't tell me-" "Indra?" The Ninetail's booming voice was tired but still cut their eardrums. "You came… You brought Ashura. He killed you, Indra. Can't you remember?"

“You attacked the village?”, Tobirama demanded, making the giant fox turn around, the movement certainly painful. “Why didn’t you tell them, Indra?”, it asked, but didn’t wait for an answer, instead going on slowly, as if to fight for every word. “Two shinobi… There were two shinobi. They attempted to attack me, I don’t know why, I don’t care. Humans… dreadful humans. I devoured them whole. But instead of dying, they… feasted on my flesh. When I realised, it was too late. They poisoned me… poisoned my chakra with theirs. I was fully conscious, forced to do their bidding. Indra… Indra was the one who fought me. And then, he killed them.” Its red eyes narrowed. “But tell me, tiny human… Who are you, daring questioning me?”

“Ah… that’s Tobirama, my little brother”, Hashirama piped in, making the Kyuubi turn to him. “Ashura”, it stated, quietly somehow, even though its voice was still booming. “I have missed you, Ashura… You have taken Indra from us. And then, you have never come to us again. Tell me, Ashura. Do you hate us? Do you hate your brothers?”

“Tobirama is my only remaining brother”, Hashirama answered, a little helplessly, and Madara sighed. “Whoever Indra and Ashura were, we aren’t them, Kyuubi. I have already told you.”

The Ninetails attempted to answer but was interrupted by a heavy gush of blood running from between its teeth. “Ah!” Hashirama stepped foward. “Do you want me to take a look at your injuries? I could-” “Anja”, his younger brother interrupted, hissing at the older Senju, “Would you get a grip on your medical-complex for about two minutes and actually think about what you’re offering?”

“I think you should help”, Izuna stated, making Tobirama frown. “I would expect you to oppose”, the Senju noted. “After all, Madara is blind due to the Kyuubi’s attack. What reason do we have to believe it, after all?”

“How about the fact I killed two shinobi the Ninetails threw up”, Madara interrupted, arms crossed, followed by a nod of his younger brother. “You wouldn’t have brought us here in the first place, if you wouldn’t believe any of this”, he stated. His faith in his older brother was unwavering; Madara’s actions had always spoken louder than his words. “Any idea why it insists on that Indra-name”, he asked, making his older brother shake his head. “I assume it’s the delirium talking”, he suspected. “But still, it’s suspicious. I’m no medic and the only one capable of healing a tailed beast is-” “Hashirama”, Izuna finished, nodding.

A moment passed in silence, before Hashirama grinned. “*Yosh!*” His eyes shone with excitement. “Let’s get to work, then. Kyuubi! I need you to stay down. You’re too tall otherwise.”

Three wooden clones appeared from Hashirama’s back, jumping right to the heavily injured fox. “If you are going to slaughter me as well, so be it, Ashura”, the Ninetails declared. Hashirama huffed. “Don’t be so pessimistic!” He made way to the giant head, carefully lowering his hands on the orange fur, while his clones did the same at the Bijuu’s back, belly and nearly amputated hindleg. A mere moment after, Hashirama realised he wouldn’t just need chakra to heal the beast. He’d need *chakra*, amounts no other medical shinobi came even close to possess. It was strange, the Bijuu nearly seemed to consist of compressed energy, instead of flesh. “I will start now”, he informed, before an impressive amount of

chakra burst around him, as well as his three clones. Within seconds, the energy had been absorbed by the large beast and Hashirama closed his eyes in concentration. This was a first for him and while he loved the challenge, he wouldn't want to fail.

The amount of chakra that was simply absorbed by the Kyuubi without even doing any good was enormous and Hashirama was well aware, it would drain even the most skilled of shinobi in minutes, maybe even less.

The clone on the beast's hindleg started first, mending flesh and bone, connecting severed muscle, carefully repairing the giant gash while continuing to infuse ridiculous amounts of chakra so the one supposed to be dealing with the actual injury wouldn't just get nullified as well.

Afterwards, the clone treating the Kyuubi's belly started mending inner injuries, closing the punctured stomach first, that had gastric acid seeping into the fox's organic tissue, before taking care of a ripped kidney.

Hashirama and his last remaining clone meanwhile sewed shut countless other injuries that weren't just as grave, ranking from fractured bones to wounds that already had started to fester.

Afterwards, he didn't know how long he had been treating the giant fox but had to admit, even he felt a little tired with the enormous masses of chakra he had have to spend. The Ninetails had fallen asleep when he had been halfway done. His clones disappeared, and he straightened, making his aching back crack. "All done", he declared, making way back to Madara and their little brothers.

"You don't want to wake it?", Tobirama asked sceptically, making Izuna snort. "Are you insane? People get fucking pissed if you wake them for nothing and I don't think being a Bijuu makes a difference for that." The younger Senju lifted an eyebrow. It wasn't that he was keen on a Tailed Beast attacking their village anytime soon, but truth was, it might. He would rather avoid that.

"Tell your Senju to leave it be", Madara ordered. "The Uchiha will do the same. If it tries to attack again, so be it. I'm already blind, can't get worse for me. Besides, with the four of us combined, fighting off another attack will be far less of an issue."

Hashirama nodded. "Let's go back to the village, then", he declared. "I want to treat your lungs again; you need to cough up more."

"Fucking tyrant."

Truth to be told, Hashirama hadn't forgotten to rebuild the Uchiha clanheads' house during the last few days. Neither was he too tired, unconcentrated, or -least of all- lazy. He just… he just enjoyed Madara's presence at his home. Right now, the two of them were standing next to each other on the cliff, watching over their village. Hashirama's mood darkened. Well, he watched. Madara just… Slowly, his smile lowered. Madara just kept him company.

“Hokage.”

His best friend’s blind eyes turned to him. “Hm?”

“Ho-ka-ge. The Shadow of Fire. Someone who protects the village and its citizens from the shadows. I think… That’s what our leader should be called”, he declared, eyes still resting on their village. “Besides the Senju and the Uchiha, it seems the Sarutobi and Shimura clans also want to join.”

“The Yamanaka are considering as well”, Madara agreed, making Hashirama beam at him and the Uchiha could nearly physically feel the joy he was radiating. “We need to elect a leader soon…” He still wanted Madara to be the one, but refrained from bringing up the topic again, “And we’re going to need to come up with a name for the village, too.” He turned to the Uchiha at his side. “Any thoughts?”

Madara kept quiet for a while, instead carefully drawing a single leaf the wind had carried to him through his fingers. As it was just spring, it was still soft, dry and felt almost fluffy. He knew their village had been erected in the middle of the forest, the trees still pale green as they always were right after winter. Tender. Breakable. Promising the start of something far greater. “How about…” His thump caressed the soft surface his eyes were unable to see, “Konoha…gakure. The Village hidden in the Leaves?”

He could nearly hear the depressive cloud slamming Hashirama’s face down. “It’s too simple. It’s not imaginative.” His voice became even more sullen. “You called it exactly as you saw it.”

“I’m not seeing anything, you depressive bastard”, Madara bawled, making his best friend flinch at his inept chosen words. However, before he could apologise, the Uchiha waltzed on. “Besides, how’s it different from ‘Hokage’?! And you still get depressed over nothing! Tch!” The Uchiha stared ahead. “How did I even become friends with you moron?”

Hashirama peeked up from under his raining cloud. “Well, it all started when you tried to skip that rock and-” “Fuck off!”

And just like that, the outburst of temper the Uchiha leader was infamous for all across fire country was over and he smiled. “It doesn’t truly matter, does it”, he finally asked. “The names, I think. Names mean nothing. But this… this is so much more. I will protect it with all my might, the devil may dare.”

For a moment, Hashirama just watched his best friend’s features. How his hair gleamed in the sun, streaks of blue making it so much more intense, like silky onyx. The fair skin, the regal features, underlined by the deep lines beneath his eyes. Madara was a beautiful man indeed, way more so than he would ever be, and he wasn’t jealous about it. No, he was… He was… Hashirama frowned. He was *something*. He just couldn’t determine what. Without his doing, his fingers reached out. He admired the Uchiha’s beauty, but he would never dare to- “There you are! What are you dawdling here for?”

Hashirama flinched guiltily. (Why? He hadn’t done anything. He had just been… just…)

“The Yamanaka have arrived”, Izuna added, standing next to the younger Senju. They had been searching for their brothers for nearly half an hour by now, before finally making way up here.

Side by side, the four brothers made way back to their village.

Konohagakure. Konohagakure it was.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

In which so much stuff was supposed to happen, but now it's all talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“No!”

“But-”

“Fuck off!”

“You can’t just-”

“I’ll throw you the fuck out of here!”

“This is *my* house!”

On the first floor, Izuna sighed, sipping on his tea. “You think they’ll stop anytime soon?”

At the other side of the table, Tobirama’s face didn’t betray any emotion, as he stirred some soy-sauce into his rice. “No.”

“- destroyed my fucking house!”

“I already said I’m sorry!”

The young Uchiha rubbed his forehead. “I think I’m getting a headache.”

“Don’t you start, too”, Tobirama warned. “My brother’s medical complex doesn’t stop at Madara. At this rate, we’ll never get anything done.”

He was right. Their two brothers were still -to put it nicely- discussing about the upcoming election. Since Uchiha and Senju had been the ones to found it, their clans were to be the ones to elect the future leader of the village. And if they wanted it to stay that way, they had to hurry: Negotiations with the Yamanaka were nearly finished, the clan was more than willing to join Konohagakure. The Sarutobi and Shimura weren’t far behind and they’d need to elect a leader -a Hokage (fucking shit, Izuna thought; Hashirama was just as unimaginative as his older brother)- before any of the other clans officially joined the village.

However; they seemed to be at a dead end here.

"*You* should be Hokage!"

Ah, cutting to the core once more, Tobirama noted wryly.

"Everyone will vote for you, anyway!"

"In that case, it won't hurt to put yourself up for election!"

Here we go again, Izuna asserted.

"I won't", Madara answered simply, making his little brother sigh deeply. While Hashirama wanted Madara to become Hokage, his older brother right out refused, no matter how the Senju-leader approached the topic. He didn't know if Hashirama was aware, but Madara was deeply convinced, no-one besides his little brother and Hashirama himself would vote for him, Senju and Uchiha alike, for… various reasons. The latest -his blindness- had Izuna curl his hands into fists, hidden under the table.

It was cruel indeed, Izuna thought, that even before his physical blindness, a metaphorical one was already upon his brother. The people of Konoha adored Madara. He had heard them talk and whisper in a way his older brother didn't -a certain benefit of not being the one in spotlight all the time.

How he had taken on Hashirama, even in his critically ill state, to protect his younger brother.

How he hadn't expected to live long enough to see the village come to fruition but still did everything in his power to make it flourish.

How he had fought his own clansman, in order to keep their union up.

How he had taken on the Kyuubi by himself to protect them all, losing his eyesight in the process.

Of course, Hashirama was just as admired, the way he had protected Madara when Fukito and Masaru attempted to slaughter him on the battlefield just one example.

Meanwhile, the bickering on the upper floor intensified. "Aniki won't step down", Izuna muttered, making Tobirama huff. "Tell me about it", he grumbled, before leaning back in his seat a little, done with his lunch. "We need to call on elections within the next three days, if we want to avoid trouble with the Yamanaka", he stated, making Izuna nod broodily. "How are we going to do any of it, with my brother being a mule?", he asked, frowning. "He wants Hashirama to be declared Hokage and be done with it. We can't just throw his hat in the ring without his approval."

The Senju nodded. "I agree. And neither can we just declare Hashirama Hokage. The village is the start of a new era and the old ways have no place here; our new leader has to be elected democratically." Even if they didn't want to.

"I have an idea", Izuna finally stated, resting his cheek in his palm. "It might be brilliant… or backfire right on our asses."

Tobirama's eyes glinted. "I'm all ears."

"Go fuck yourself!"

"You're literally in my bedroom!"

"Shouldn't stop you and your obnoxious touchy complex!"

"You know what? Fine, then! Here, take my-"

"You fucking pervert! Put that on again! I can't believe I'm friends with you, you exhibitionistic asshole!"

"You're just jealous because you can't even pee when someone's watching!"

"Oh, so we're digging out the old stuff? So, what about that one time when we-"

One floor down, a single Senju swallowed. "Shouldn't we… Stop them or something?"

Izuna snorted. "You want to go upstairs and stop them? Give it a shot. I'll be waiting down here, when Aniki kicks you straight through the floor. They're at it since…" "Three thirty", Tobirama supplied, making Izuna huff. At this point, he didn't even know who was worse; Hashirama who refused to back down, or Madara who very much did the same. Upstairs, something crashed, and he didn't even care any longer who had knocked over a vase, a painting, a chair or whatever it was that had fallen into the line of rage. "Aniki usually goes hoarse after around two hours. This is a personal best."

"Lucky you", the albino in front of him grumbled. The two of them sat hunched over a pile of papers and scrolls, obviously planning something they were unwilling to share at this point. "Hashirama never does." Curse him and his regenerative throat. Then, he finally steered his attention back to the Senju in front of them, who was looking rather insecure by now. "Tsubisa", he greeted. "What brings you here?" It had to be something rather important, since Tsubisa had let himself in, when nobody answered his knocking -with was frankly spoken due to none of them hearing it over the sound of their idiotic brothers upstairs.

"The Kyuubi has woken up."

As the beast had fallen asleep right after Hashirama's treatment, two Senju and two Uchiha had been guarding it, commanded to retreat and report immediately, if it grew to be aggressive. "Did it attack?", Tobirama therefore demanded, making Tsubisa shake his head in denial. "No. But it… asked to meet Hashirama-sama and Madara-sama."

"You know what? Fuck you! I'll rather deal with the Ninetails than your sorry ass!"

"Wha- Madara! You can't go alone! Oi! Wait for me!"

"Have a wank in the kitchen, I don't give a fuck!"

The Uchiha leader made his way downstairs, right to the entrance, where he'd taken off his shoes before entering the house. He bent down to grasp them where he'd left them and his hands found nothing but the clean wooden floor. A heavy silence lowered itself upon them, as once again they were reminded that even though he was still an exceptional shinobi, Madada was indeed blind. He seemed so unfazed by it, so uncaring, that one could simply assume he was still the same as before the battle. Izuna supressed the reflex to rush at his brother's side to aid him, as he knew it would only make him feel like a cripple. He hated being reminded of his handicap.

"Ah!" Tsubisa was the first one to react. "I'm sorry, Madara-sama! I put your shoes aside when I entered! Let me-" Before he was able to do whatever it was he had been up to, Hashirama stepped forth, making his clansman retreat. He took the sandals -just half a meter to Madara's left. "Let me", he offered quietly, getting down on his knees in front of the Uchiha, carefully taking one of his feet and slipping it into the sandal, before lacing the strings and carefully brushing his index finger over a small cut he had probably obtained by stepping on a sharp rock or the end of a branch, healing the small wound in a careful caress.

When he was done, he continued with the Uchiha's other foot, making the raven blink. "What… do you think you're doing", he asked, voice hoarse. On his knees in front of him, Hashirama gently lowered the still naked foot into the other shoe, smiling, even though his friend was unable to see it. "Just helping a little." He tucked the laces and stood again, before putting on his own shoes. "Let's get going!" He grabbed Madara's hand, ignoring the Uchiha's indignant splutter, before dragging him along next to him, carefully making sure his every step was safe.

Left behind, the two younger brothers threw each other a look. Leaving these two to deal with a giant demonic fox just screamed for trouble. Delaying their plans be for today, they took off right after, leaving behind poor Tsubisa.

"There we are", Hashirama declared, making Madara next to him snort. "I would've been able to get here on my own, you know?", he asserted, making the Senju hum, before he turned to the Kyuubi sitting on its hind legs, towering above them. It hadn't moved from its former place, still sitting beneath the large ledge he had slept under. "I see you've woken up." Hashirama smiled. "Want me to take another look at you?"

For a long moment, the giant fox kept silent, watching the Senju leader sharply, before finally speaking up. "You are not Ashura", it declared, voice booming even though it wasn't particularly loud and ignoring the former question. Its pupils narrowed, and the long ears flattened a little, as it growled. "Tell me, tiny human… why did you spare me?"

"Oh." The Senju blinked. "You'll have to ask Madara. He was the one who fought you. I just healed you up a little afterwards."

The Ninetails' piercing gaze lowered on the Uchiha, its pupils by now even tighter slits that usual. "Madara… That is your name? Well, then. Why did you spare me… chakra-thief?"

The raven-haired man frowned. “I didn’t steal anything, least of all chakra”, he stated, crossing his arms in front of his chest. “And I didn’t kill you, because you obviously weren’t in your right mind. I killed the two shinobi who steered you. You even asked me to do so… and kept calling me Indra, even though I don’t know whom you were referring to.”

“Ah.” The Kyuubi rose its head, looking somewhere in the distance nobody else was able to see. “You people have already forgotten. But it is no wonder, I assume. You are short-lived, after all.”

“Forgotten what?” Out of the trees, Tobirama and Izuna descended next to their brothers, the former the one having asked. The Kyuubi’s teeth bared. “And who are you, disrupters?”, it demanded, making Hashirama spread his arms soothingly. “Tobirama and Izuna, our little brothers”, he introduced, making the Ninetails go still for a moment, before declaring: “They are no brothers of mine.”

“But we are?”, Hashirama asked, visibly confused, making the giant fox watch him for a moment too long, before swiftly asking: “What about these”, obviously referring to the three remaining shinobi.

“They were to guard you while you were unconscious. None of us knew how you would react upon waking. If you want them gone, they will leave”, Madara stated, making it obvious the two newcomers wouldn’t be included by the order.

“I do not care”, the demon fox finally decided, before its red eyes fixated Tobirama. “Be careful, so-called brother of his… the hand that struck down one sibling already will have less qualms doing so again.”

The Senju who had been ordered to guard the sleeping Bijuu alongside Tsubisa gasped, as Tobirama curled his hands into fists, taking a step forth. “How dare you-” It was Hashirama’s outstretched arm that stopped him. “What are you referring to?”, he asked quietly, unfazed by his little brother’s anger. There was something deep here, something most significant, that would explain so very much. He just had the *feeling* that whatever it was, the Kyuubi referred to, would… he wasn’t certain about what it would. But he was certain it was important.

“If you truly seek answers”, the Ninetails offered after a silence that dragged too long, “I will tell you. But I warn you… It will be long ones. And some stories are better off forgotten.”

Thick, fluffy moss blossomed from the ground, as Madara sat down cross-legged and Hashirama laughed sheepishly (he hadn’t intended, he really didn’t! It just kind of… happened sometimes), as the Uchiha threw him a sour glance before taking a seat as well, followed by a hesitating Izuna. Tobirama preferred standing. “We’re all in.”

For a moment, the beast watched them, a strange expression crossing its face, before it slowly began talking, its voice quiet despite its booming volume. “Centuries upon centuries ago, in an era of endless war… a woman named Ōtsutsuki Kaguya existed. She wished the everlasting fights to end.” Hashirama threw his best friend a quick look. That sounded familiar enough. “In an attempt to gain enough power to end the bloodshed, she consumed the fruit of the God Tree, even though her clan was in desperate need to harvest it… Thus becoming the first person endowed with chakra. She ended the wars, taking control over the

nations and finally gave birth to twin sons. Hagoromo and Hamura were the first ones to be born with chakra. But good things never last… Kaguya sought to unite all chakra within herself-" "But… Why would she do that?", Hashirama interrupted, genuinely confused, making the demon fox sigh. "Do not be so impatient. Even though the question you ask is a good one, the answer is even longer than this story. I might tell you some other time… if you still are interested. Now, however… Kaguya's desire to reclaim her chakra finally set her up against her very own sons, for those were the only ones alongside her possessing it. She merged with the God Tree-" Hashirama opened his mouth, "I do not know how", Hashirama's mouth closed, "Becoming a ten-tailed monstrosity." Ah, if that didn't sound suspicious, Madara thought, watching the Bijuu's many tails.

"So, I guess the brothers fought her", Izuna assumed, making the Kyuubi turn towards him. "Indeed, they did", it confirmed. "Hagoromo and Hamura sealed the beast -at the time unknowing it was their mother- using its very shell to do so. The remains formed what today is known as moon."

Every shinobi listening rose their heads, watching the pale silhouette that had yet to fade from the sky. The… moon? That was, frankly spoken, ridiculous. No jutsu would be powerful enough to create a whole celestial body! And besides… "What does this have to do with my brother", Tobirama demanded. Touching as this story might be, it didn't get them any answers, just rising new questions the beast seemed to be unwilling to discuss for the moment. "Everything", the Ninetails growled in answer. "But if you do not wish to hear what I have to tell you, I might as well leave!"

"Ah!" Hashirama looked to his brother, then to the giant fox. "Tobirama always wants to cut straight to the core… He's never been one for long stories, even as a child. Please, don't take it personal. I really want to hear what happened next!" At this point, it didn't really matter if everything the Kyuubi told them was nonsense or made up. He just wanted to know… whatever it was, that was so incredible important. And since Madara hadn't interrupted the story once, he was quite certain the Uchiha thought the same.

"Hamura took over leadership of the Ōtsutsuki clan", the demon fox continued after another moment, "And departed to the moon to guard the beast's remains, while Hagoromo remained on Earth in order to spread chakra to humanity. They named him… The Sage of Six Paths."

"No way!" Izuna gasped, eyes nearly bulging out. The Sage of Six Paths was a myth! A legend! A story, small children were told to fall asleep to, but- "Ah… So, he has not been forgotten." In a way, that was a relief. Hagoromo being forgotten was just wrong in so many ways and hurt in many more. He had deeply desired peace, even though he knew a goal great as this wouldn't be achieved in his lifetime. The demon fox remembered their last talk, right before his death, how the tears had fallen for days afterwards, as the nine of them had lost him to old age.

"Hagoromo fathered two sons. Indra, the older one, was intelligent and mighty, a born leader", the fox waltzed on, before anyone else was able to interrupt again. He wanted to get this over with, before the memories became overwhelming. "Ashura, the second, proved the be the opposite. However, he had a way to befriend all those around him and uniting people in a way nobody else could." Izuna and Tobirama shared a look. If this didn't suspiciously

sound like- “Inspired by his younger son’s way of love, Hagoromo separated the ten tailed beast’s chakra within his body and divided it into nine separated bodies. That is how we Bijuu were born.”

Hashirama rested his head on his cheek, looking thoughtful. “So, what you’re saying is that the tailed beasts were created by the Sage of Six Paths from the sealed chakra of his mother who merged with a tree.” He blinked. “That sounds… Kinda awkward.”

“You’re the one who’s awkward.” Madara huffed. “And stop growing these berries all around me.”

The Senju leader looked aside, finally noticing the branches filled with thick, ripe and red berries, one of them nearly twining around the Uchiha’s ankle. The raven picked a berry up and threw it at Hashirama’s head, making him pout. “You could just eat them, you know?”, he sulked, making Madara roll his eyes, before resting them on the Kyuubi again. He had the feeling the story was wrapping up… and the ending wouldn’t be a happy one. Unfortunately, those were for children only. Life tended to be cruel.

The fox stayed silent for too long again, before continuing its story, looking at the two clan leaders and at the same time, straight through them, as if seeing something -someone?- nobody else did. “I… We… All of us… Considered Hagoromo our father. We loved him deeply. And we loved his sons, too. As they were our father’s sons, they were our brothers. We loved them, all nine of us. Helped them with ninshū whenever we could. I do not know how often Matatabi -whom you will only know as Two-Tails- let Ashura practise his ninshū with her, as her wavering chakra made it easier for Ashura to grasp it. And I loved them. Oh, how I loved our brothers…” The giant head lowered, and claws crushed stone and dirt, as they dug into the ground, shaking the underground. “But nothing good ever lasts. Father needed to name a successor, and things went… wrong, more than once. When Hagoromo named Ashura his successor, Indra was outraged. The two brothers fought each other to the death and ultimately… Indra lost. That day, he swore to make his path reality, no matter how many lifetimes it would take.”

The Kyuubi looked aside and for a moment, it nearly seemed to cry. “Ashura never visited any of us again… And we hadn’t lost just one brother, but two. Father’s ninshū soon was forgotten, forged into nin-jutsu, no longer the power of peace, but of war. Indra had proven to be right… and we tailed beasts weren’t considered more than massive chakra-sources, just a few generations after father’s death.” Its red eyes fixated Madara once more. He had been the only one to not interrupt him, listening quietly, as he always did… Just like Indra had always used to. “During the battle with you, I was barely conscious. But I recognised you… I always would. I begged for your help… because all I perceived within you in that moment was Indra’s chakra, that I thought lost forever when his own brother slayed him more than an era ago.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry the chapter took so long. I really had a hard time with it... Kurama's story was a mess. I originally wanted to skip it, but that didn't work out, after that it turned out way too long, and now it's... well, this.
In case you're wondering why it may differ from anime and/or manga: This is Kurama's view on the past. Therefore, it differs from Hagoromo's story a litte, especially considering Indra and Ashura.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

The multiverse theorie explains, in an infinite number of universes, an infinite number of differing realities co-exist. Hashirama has never been much of a scientist, though.

Chapter Notes

Some of you asked about the Uzumaki. You're totally right with that, but... To be honest, this whole story was supposed to be a OneShot. A few thousand words, tops. And then, somehow, this happened and Poof... thirty-thousand words ongoing. So, yeah... I didn't forget about them, I just don't know yet how to include them into the story. It will happen, though. At some point. Somehow.
Also, I'll have you know that the stuff that didn't happen yet in this chapter was supposed to happen in the last chapter and now happenes in the next chapter. Can't take THAT much longer to name a Hokage, after all (btw, who'd you prefer? Hashirama or Madara? Or someone else who actually has their shit together?).

“So, what you are saying is, my brother’s chakra is similar to Indra’s”, Izuna attempted to sum the story up, having the Ninetails bare its teeth at him. “What I am saying is, that his chakra *is* Indra’s”, it clarified. Did the brat not listen? Everyone knew chakra was as unique as fingerprints. Even twins didn’t share their chakra-markers, even though they often were quite similar.

“But what about-” “I am not Indra”, Madara interrupted whatever Hashirama attempted to say. “And Hashirama is not Ashura.” The Uchiha might be blind, but he wasn’t deaf. The demon fox had called his best friend by the at that time unfamiliar name more than once. It’s wasn’t that hard to put two and two together. “We aren’t the brothers you lost, no matter what you think. My father was Uchiha Tajima” Who hopefully rotted in hell right now, “And my brother is Uchiha Izuna. Whatever you wish to see in us, Kyuubi, it isn’t-”

“Kurama.” This time, it was the demon fox who interrupted, making Madara frown. “My name is Kurama”, the Ninetails repeated, making Izuna’s mouth drop open. That Bijuu had a *name*? “Father named all of us”, the fox clarified, before its long ears flattened against its skull. “But as the humans forgot about our origin, they forgot about our names, as well. By now, we are nothing to them, but weapons they seek to abuse for their own goals.”

Hashirama’s face showed what he exceled at: Empathy. “I’m sorry for your loss”, he offered, truly serene. Losing beloved ones was always harsh, no matter the circumstances. If he

imagined Kuwarama and Itama battle each other to death, he found he couldn't even bear the thought. "But Madara is right, I'm not Ashura. And I could never…" His eyes darkened. "I could never kill Madara… Or Tobirama. I'd rather gut myself." Would he? Would he truly? For a moment, the darkest image flashed his mind. No. No, he could never… could he? "But… The Senju and Uchiha forged our village to overcome old hatred and senseless war. We might not be your brothers… But you could join, as well." The Senju leader's face was bright with hope. "There's a place for everyone who wishes for peace in Konohagakure, you know!" The longer he talked about it, the more the idea appealed to him. "You should come with us!"

For a moment, even Tobirama was speechless by this much… this much… *Hashiramaness*! He knew his brother was a do-gooder, he always had been the most shining example of one. But asking a Bijuu to join their barely months old village was too much, even for him. "Anjia! Would you cut it out and just turn on that brain of yours for even a moment", he snapped, arms crossed. "Negations with the Yamanaka are nearly over, the Sarutobi are nearly as close to joining, but nobody agreed to this!"

Obviously confused, Hashirama turned to him. "That's because not even we could know this would happen", he explained, as if it was the most obvious fact this side of fire country. "They'll still join."

"We all heard rumours about other villages forming. Hosting a Bijuu in ours won't help obtaining peace." Harsh as it was, their largest goal had to be the safe-keeping of their people! There already had been an attempt in destroying Konohagakure, they couldn't afford another!

Hashirama frowned. "He said his name is Kurama", he corrected his brother and his tone indicated this new idea of his was as unbreakable as his mokuton. "Even if we aren't his actual brothers, he could still live with us! It's not his fault he attacked the village, after all."

Kurama frowned, the expression looking rather threatening on his features, even if it wasn't intended. "And what *does* make us brothers?", he asked. "We Bijuu are chakra-constructs. Father created us, giving us a body, an identity… our origin differs from yours, blood and birth mean little to us. But Indra and Ashura were his sons as well, born from Hagoromo's chakra -the same chakra he created us with. The very same one, that lives on in you."

While Izuna opened his mouth to protest -it wasn't that easy! Madara was *his* brother, after all!- Hashirama beamed. "In that case, there's even more reason to join the village!"

Tobirama supressed the urge to bury his face in his hands. Kami, what had he done to deserve that brother of his?

Madara took a deep breath. "Hashirama…" "Yes?", the Senju asked brightly, turning towards his friend. However, before the Uchiha was able to answer, the Ninetails interrupted him. "A lot has changed over all these centuries… you did not."

While both, Tobirama and Izuna frowned upon this remark, Hashirama was way too busy being ridiculously excited and happy about his new idea. Kurama was the one to break the awkward moment. "So many years have passed… all of us have come to terms with our

brothers gone, our father's death. Us, forgotten and hated. I cannot answer your demand now… Hashirama. I will talk to the others, for we haven't meet in a long time. The hatred we were met with also spread amongst ourselves, separating us from each other. Matatabi will be overjoyed, I believe. She has always loved you most… as I loved Indra best."

Hashirama's face fell upon the Kyuubi's declaration. "But you will come back, won't you?", he asked, making Kurama go still for a moment, before the edges of his maw turned upwards, showing even more of his gleaming teeth. "I promise."

"Hashirama!"

"Madara!"

The two of them dashed at each other, Madara's eyes glowing with something dark, not too far from madness, his features a mask of fury. Behind him, the Ninetails roared, and Hashirama summoned his mokuton to bind the raging beast.

Hours upon hours passed and at some point, the Bijuu got sealed away, punished for a deed that was never its fault in the first place.

Facing each other at the river, panting and bleeding, Hashirama drew his katana once more. He had to protect his village! He had to protect his people! And he would annihilate everyone who dared to oppose it! That was his duty as Hokage.

He flashed behind Madara's unprotected back, tricking him with a wooden clone, since the lack of chakra had forced him to deactivate his Sharingan. With lightning speed, the katana cut muscle and flesh; blood splattered over his hands and-

"No!"

Panting heavily, Hashirama jolted out of sleep, stumbling towards the bathroom, where he fell to his knees and emptied his clenching stomach into the toilet. His hands… He had to wash his hands. Had to clean them of Madara's blood.

He pushed himself up, wet fingers nearly slipping on the cold floor. He was… He did…

"Hashirama?"

The Senju flinched but didn't stop until he had reached the sink, turning on boiling hot water, scrubbing his hands. Blood swirled down the drain.

"Hashirama! What the hell are you doing?"

His skin was an angry shade of red by now, his body regenerating the burned tissue just fast enough it didn't blister. The water was clean by now, but he still couldn't stop. There was more, had to be more, the blood had splattered everywhere, gotten into his hair, on his face, had… A rough hand tore him backwards, away from the steaming water. "What are you doing, you idiot", Madara barked, making Hashirama look at him, a look of pure panic

plastered on his face. “I killed you… I killed you, because… I can’t be Hokage! I will not! Madara!”

The Uchiha frowned. Nightmares weren’t uncommon for shinobi – quite the opposite, actually- but he hadn’t seen anyone react this violently. “Calm down, Hashirama”, he ordered. Thank Kami, Izuna and Tobirama were out for tonight, even though he had no idea what exactly their little brothers were up to. “You had a nightmare. It wasn’t real. Let’s get you some water.”

Hashirama shook his head violently. He couldn’t stomach anything right now, but his mind cleared a little. He looked at his hands. The tortured skin already healed, and he supressed the urge to clean himself again. Madara’s blood had been much too bright on his toned skin. “I killed you”, he finally whispered. “We fought… And I killed you. I thought I had to, because it was my duty as Hokage to defend the village, even from you. I had to clean my hands, had to… had to…” He didn’t know. All he knew was one thing. “I can’t be Hokage, Madara! I can’t ever hurt you!” He sank down to the floor again and after a moment, Madara sat down next to him.

“I’m here”, he finally stated. “And I’m not going anywhere. It was just a dream, Hashirama.” Probably a result from the attack of the Kyuubi, mixed with its tale about Ashura killing his older brother and Hashirama’s general aversion to become Hokage for some reason.

Hashirama pulled Madara towards himself, burying his face in his mane of midnight blue hair. He smelled of ashes, hot stones and warmth and something that was solely Madara, he guessed, closing his eyes. The closeness calmed him. Madara was here, he was very much alive in his arms. Hashirama didn’t… Didn’t kill him. He could never. His arms tightened around the Uchiha’s slim body.

Meanwhile, Madara was stuck in his friend’s embrace, his back stiff, his eyes wide. Hashirama had always been a touchy person, but this was another level. What had gotten into that idiot Senju? Just… He took a deep breath -and failed, as Hashirama’s chest was right in the way of his own, as the Senju tightened his hold even farther. He could feel Hashirama’s warm breath in his hair. It was still uneven, even stuttering at times.

After a while -and after Hashirama didn’t release him- Madara awkwardly patted his back. “It’s alright”, he tried his best to soothe once more. “I’m right here. You can let go now.”

And Hashirama, stubborn fucker that he was, just tightened his hold, as to never let go.

Finally, the Senju loosened his hold a little, even though he still refused to let go. “I dreamed you attacked the village”, he explained, way too quietly for his usual cheery self, unable to look at his best friend. “We fought… And I killed you.” He shuddered, his hold on Madara shaking a little. “I stabbed you and your blood splattered everywhere. I woke up and felt as though my hands were still covered in it. I went to the bathroom and cleaned them, over and over again.” The *until you stopped me* went unsaid and Madara frowned. “Did hurt yourself?”, he asked, making the Senju mimic his expression. “No”, he negated and slowly turned around, to see whatever had caught Madara’s attention.

On the ground, right next to the toilet, a single handprint glinted wetly in the dim light, the blood not having dried yet. The far too familiar metallic smell had been caught by the Uchiha first, his other senses having intensified with the absence of his eyesight.

Hashirama staggered backwards. “I didn’t”, he gasped retreating until his back met the opposite wall. “I... I would never…” *Oh, but you did, didn’t you?* He could nearly hear Madara’s voice, mocking him from out of his nightmare. *You are a hypocrite, Hashirama. So much for the great Hokage!* Madara’s voice grew taunting. *Did you enjoy killing me, Hashirama? After all, victory is always sweet.* “No… No, no, no! I didn’t!” Hashirama’s voice got louder, the taste of panic creeping back into it, as his hands clawed into the Uchiha’s yukata. “Madara! I swear, I could never! I can’t-” The last thing he saw were two Sharingan staring back into his own panicked eyes.

When Hashirama’s eyes fell shut, Madara breathed in relief. It had probably not been the best, but he couldn’t think of any other way to solve the situation. His gen-jutsu had put Hashirama into sleep, he just didn’t know how long. As soon as he had calmed a little, he would be able to snap out of it. The jutsu hadn’t been a strong one -at least not for someone of Hashirama’s calibre. However; leaving him be in his current state had been out of question. Whatever had happened in his dream, it had clearly disturbed him deeply.

He carefully took the Senju back to his futon. Whatever had happened here, it would have to wait until morning.

Hashirama was sitting on a glade, sunshine warming his face, calming his raging thoughts. Around him, the tree-leaves gently shuddered in a breeze. When he had arrived, he had been upset, panicked, but couldn’t remember why. Madara had advised taking some time off, wandering amongst the trees, as his element always put him at ease.

He took in a deep breath and tilted his face, so the sunrays would warm him. His thoughts had calmed, finally. Madara had been right, taking a walk had certainly helped. Except… He frowned. Except Madara had never advised him to. Except he never actually *went* to the forest. He had already been here from the start.

His eyes widened, and he clapped his palms together in a single seal. *”Kai!”*

“That was fast”, Madara commented, when Hashirama sat up on his futon.

“It was a weak gen-jutsu”, the Senju answered. Madara hadn’t even used his Mangekyou to cast it, otherwise escaping would have been hard even for him. “How long was I out?”

“Thirty-seven minutes”, the raven answered. “Are you feeling better now?”

Hashirama smiled, the notion bitter. “No. But I’m at my senses again.”

Madara nodded. Hashirama had always been an emotional person -way too much so, for a shinobi- but this had been exceptionally intense, even for him. “Let’s get some breakfast”, he offered. It was still too early, but he doubted either of them could go back to sleep now.

However, before he was able to get up from his makeshift place next to the futon, Hashirama's hands had clasped his face, battle-roughed palms gentle on his skin. Even though his own eyes failed him, he could feel Hashirama's gaze bore into his. (Madara had beautiful eyes, didn't he? The most exquisite shade of living onyx, luring him to let himself be captured by their sheer unending depth). The Senju was close enough he could feel his warm breath. "Hashirama." He could also feel heat rising in his cheeks. "What are you-" "I'll always protect you." The Senju's voice was barely above a whisper. "No matter what, I'll be with you! Even if one day, you decide to leave behind the village, I'll be by your side." His voice grew even closer, as Hashirama gently rested his forehead on Madara's. "Whatever happened tonight, I won't let it become reality", he swore, closing his eyes. It couldn't. He couldn't bear the thought of Madara gone, of him being left behind due to his own doing.

"Tch!" Madara averted his blind eyes, wishing he could cover his reddening cheeks. "Why would I ever leave the village, when we just founded it… idiot."

He could feel Hashirama smile at him. "It doesn't matter. Just know that if you do, I'll follow you. No matter why, no matter when." By now, the pads of his thumps drew small circles on the Uchiha's burning cheeks. "I'll always be with you. No matter what happens, I won't ever leave you alone."

Madara drew in a shaking breath, attempting to regain at least some dignity. What the hell did this idiot think he was doing? One tiny little nightmare and he went insane! How did someone like him even become clan leader in the first place? "You better do now, because I have to take a piss", he finally forced out, making the Senju go still for a minute, before he threw back his head and laughed. (Hashirama had a beautiful laugh, didn't he? Sometimes, it seemed he wanted the whole world to share his joy). "Well, since we haven't been able to work on your complex yet, I'll leave you be", he mocked, releasing his hold on his best friend's face (his skin felt cold where Hashirama had abandoned it). "Take your time, I'll be downstairs making breakfast. I could eat a horse!"

If he meant that literally, Madara was so going to kick him out of his own house. And since he already was at that… "You still have to replace our house. And don't forget the aviary. My birds are sick of having to stay in the old village."

Hashirama's head drooped a little, a sad small cloud forming above him. "I didn't mean to, you know", he mumbled. "I'm really sorry."

The Uchiha sniffed. "Stick it up your ass. You wrecked it, after all." Thank Kami his birds had taken off when Hashirama's chakra had started to demolish the house. His aviary's entrance was always opened, his birds came and went as they wanted to. They were no prisoners of his.

"How about I'll make you breakfast first?", Hashirama offered hopefully -and a little desperate, maybe- making his friend sigh exasperated. "That better be the damn best breakfast this side of fire country", he huffed, before getting up, making his way to the kitchen alongside the Senju, who was way too happy about simply eating together with his oldest friend.

Humming a small cheerful tone, Hashirama fried some fish, before preparing a handful of vegetables to be served with it. There still was enough leftover rice for the two of them. “Tobirama and Izuna didn’t make it home for the night”, he noted, putting plates on the table. “Who knows what those two are plotting”, the Uchiha grumbled, coughing a little. Hashirama carefully lowered a hand on his chest to ease the stinging. He'd treat him in a suitable manner after breakfast, as he had always done the last days. Each on their own, their brothers were bad enough. But whatever it was they were up to now gave him a headache just by thinking about it. “I would put nothing behind them.”

“Ah”, Hashirama breathed. “They’re not *that* bad. They want what’s best for the village, both of them.”

Madara’s eyes narrowed at him, as the Senju sat down next to him. “You do realise, what they believe is best for Konoha might actually fuck us over, right?”

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Elections, wohooo!

Chapter Notes

I'm really sorry this took so long. I have to wear a brace on my left wrist for a couple of weeks and typing with that is a pain -literally. Two more weeks, and I'll get rid of it! Well, at least I hope so.
Besides, I'm still wondering: Whom do you want for Hokage?

Hashirama's mouth fell open. "That was *today*?!"

Next to him, Madara wasn't even remotely surprised. Of fucking course Hashirama had forgotten the day he would be elected as Hokage. When Madara had picked him up, the Senju simply followed, happily babbling about the first classes at the Academy that were to start by the beginning of next week all the way to the small stage in the middle of their village. Sine they didn't want to prefer either, the open Senju area or the more closed off Uchiha compound, Tobirama had suggested the plaza in the middle of their village, since this was the most public place.

In lack of a proper way to deal with this mess of an older brother, Tobirama chose the facepalm. "I can't believe you forgot the elections! We settled the date a week ago!" He handed two ballot papers to a married Senju-couple who made way to the polling booth to make their votes, afterwards inserting the neatly folded strips of paper into the ballot box in front of Tobirama and Izuna, who ticked them off on a list that probably was Tobirama's doing.

"That was Senju Izushi, right?", he asked, making the albino shake his head once in denial. "Senju Tashigi", he answered. "Izushi is her sister. They don't even look alike!"

Izuna rolled his eyes. "Well, maybe they should. They're twins, after all!"

"Not every clan can consist of a family of black-haired clones", Tobirama shot back, handing some more papers to three Uchiha. "I prefer to be able to recognise which family I belong to", one of the black-haired shinobi tittered, making the man next to him nod. The two looked nearly the same, just the hair-cut differed, making Tobirama rise his eyebrows. Twins as well, probably. "Not all siblings can look alike", he noted, thinking about how he and Hashirama

really didn't have much in common. The first shinobi turned to his comrade, who shrugged. "Can't say much about that. Sarubo here is just my third-grade cousin, after all."

With that, the two men and a laughing kunoichi at their side made way to the booths, making Tobirama rub his forehead. Kami, Uchiha and their looks…

"… after all we agreed the clan-heads wouldn't vote and…" Ah, Hashirama was still attempting to soothe him by vaguely explaining how he had managed to forget the Hokage-elections. Next to him, Madara looked as though he was desperately scrapping together enough willpower to stop himself from strangling the Senju leader. "If you ask me, we should just name Hashirama Hokage and be done with it", he sighed, regretting his slip straight after when Hashirama instantly abandoned being sorry and went on explaining how the old ways had no place in their village and its leader would be elected by the will of their people.

Groaning, he pinched the bridge of his nose. "I hope for your sake you didn't even think about putting my name on those papers." Upon that, Izuna frowned. "I would never go behind your back like that, Aniki."

Madara flinched a little. He should know his little brother would never do anything like that. He was the most faithful person on this planet, and the most important one. Basically accusing him of betrayal was uncalled for. However, before he was able to apologise, Izuna handed Hashirama a ballot paper. The design was simple: The single question whether one wished for Hashirama to take over the duties as future Hokage with two options presented: Yes or No. The Senju frowned. "Madara isn't even listed as a possibility", he protested, making his oldest friend hum. "Let's keep it that way." "But-" "Time's almost up, anyway", Tobirama interrupted, before Hashirama could mess things up again. "Nearly everyone has been here. We're only missing nine Uchiha and six Senju."

Izuna nodded. "All of the Elders didn't show up so far. They probably don't want to intervene, since- Oh, me and my big mouth." From across the already quite crowded plaza - after all, the counting would start in less than the quarter of an hour- Itsuko, Sarana and Makoto made way, accompanied by Akiyama and Hibiko. Well, at least they'd be able to cross most of the still missing names, Izuna noted wryly. Makoto looked pretty pissed off, for some reason. But on the other hand, that was her favoured expression whenever it came to politics. Izuna ticked off their names on the list -only ten people hadn't partaken in the elections, one of them Hatoko who was still in a coma after attempting to fight Madara from his position as clan-leader. He'd heard at least one Senju declare she wouldn't vote, since it felt unfair to declare only one leader when two had given so much for the village and he suspected others agreed with that.

Meanwhile, Tobirama was handing out papers to the five Elders, who read them silently, before Makoto huffed. "Tobirama, get me a pencil."

"There are pencils in the polling booths", the albino stated, making the old Uchiha bark out a laugh. "You had me and my arthritis come down here to vote for someone. I won't go hiding in a tent just to please you."

"The elections are secret and democratic." Fucking shit, did Uchiha have to debate *everything*? There was a reason the papers weren't filled out in public! "We can't have public

pressure influence the outcome. That goes for any of you."

Hibiko rose a brow. "I was the one who slapped you baby-ass into breathing after you refused for a whole two minutes after being born. Now, get that stick out of your pale ass and hand me a pencil. I need to cross out a name here."

Hashirama frowned. "Cross out a name?", he parroted, making Hibiko huff, as she simply took Izuna's pencil when it turned out Tobirama wasn't going to give in. "If you think I'm going to let *you* run this village, you're an even bigger air-head than I thought." She slapped the paper on one of the tables, before crossing out the name of her clan-head. Then, she simply wrote the Uchiha-leaders name above it, before voting for Yes. She stuffed her paper into the ballot without even bothering to fold it. Hashirama's mouth fell open, while Izuna and Tobirama shared a look. Well… that was one way to do it. "With you leading the village, we'll just drown in bills and all that paperwork you love to ignore so much", she stated. "We need a brain up there." Madara felt his eye starting to twitch. He could already hear people the first rows whispering… What did that Senju woman think she was doing?!

Itsuko took the pen, making a single mark, stating he agreed with Hashirama becoming Hokage. "The Uchiha can't have their clan-head run straight onto everything even remotely dangerous and get himself killed within the first week once he leads the village", he grumbled way too loudly, slapping the paper into Tobirama's hand. Quite synchronised to Madara, the young Senju's left eye started twitching, too.

"Whose side are you even on", Madara demanded, making Itsuko huff. "The clan's." Oh, and wasn't that fantastic. The three others took their votes as well, neither of them bothering to go to the booths. Akiyama voted for his own clan-head, Makoto stated No, and Sarana simply crossed out everything and wrote her cat's name on top of the paper. So much for that.

It wasn't even ten minutes until the elections would be officially closed. The five of them took their places behind the large table, as they would supervise the counting.

Hashirama's presence was obligatory since he was the one running for Hokage. After some (maybe even some more) convincing from both, his best friend and his little brother, Madara had agreed to attend as well.

Tobirama was the one to read out the ballots, Izuna would count the votes. They just hoped their plan would work at least a little.

As soon as the remaining minutes had ticked off, Tobirama took the key that was tied to the ballot box, opening the lock at the top. Since the front was made of glass, everyone was able to see how he once stirred the papers, before grabbing one and carefully unfolding it on the table. "Yes", he declared, loud enough to be heard behind the front rows, before putting the ballot aside, while Izuna marked the vote on his own documents.

"Yes", he read the second and third ballot, before taking the fourth. "No", he declared, followed by another "Yes". Then, he took out the fifth one, loudly reading "Uchiha Madara". The Uchiha leader's eye started to twitch again. That damn Hibiko. Tobirama went on, declaring two "Yes", before carefully unfolding another ballot. It was marked with neither, Yes or No, instead simply stating "Uchiha Madara!".

“What”, the Uchiha leader spluttered, taking the ballot out of Tobirama’s fingers even though he couldn’t read it anymore. Someone had written his name all across the paper, the kanji leaving no doubt he or she was quite angry about having to state their opinion in that manner. Izuna and Tobirama glanced at each other. That was what they had hoped for. Since Madara had right out refused to participate in the elections, naming him on the ballots wouldn’t have done any good. However, even if people were only able to vote about Hashirama as future Hokage, they still needed to have the possibility to reject him as such. And if enough of them did so, there was no other way but to propose for Madara as Hokage as well in another run. And while Izuna had hoped some people would vote for his older brother despite him not officially partaking, he couldn’t help the wave of relief overcoming him, as he marked the vote. Madara had so little faith in himself, as well as in the picture the people of Konohagakure had of him.

“That ballot is invalid”, the Uchiha-leader finally snapped. “I don’t partake in the elections for Hokage.”

Izuna suppressed a sigh. Kami, his older brother was such a mess at times. Once he set his mind onto something, he just stuck to it, ignoring each and every sign he was up to a huge load of bull-crap once again.

“Just because Hashirama officially partakes in the elections, that doesn’t mean nobody else is to be voted for”, Tobirama stated, taking another ballot. “The people of Konoha may vote for whomever they wish.”

“And you’re telling me that *now*”, Madara hissed, making the younger Senju face his wrath rather unimpressed. “You simply refused to officially partake, but we cannot forbit people voting for you. Everything else would have been unagreeable with our concept of democracy.” And with that, the Senju bastard simply went on reading out ballots, declaring twice a Yes, thrice a No, another Yes, before once again someone had crossed out the Senju leader’s name, stating Madara’s in its place.

“Madara.” A warm hand lowered on his shoulder and the Uchiha didn’t need his eyes to know he was now on the receiving end of one of Hashirama’s warm, gentle expressions. “Why don’t we take a seat while Tobirama and Izuna count? All that stress is poison for your lungs.”

“I’m not on the verge of death, Hashirama.”

“Not anymore”, the Senju argued, making his oldest friend snort. “Can you say that even louder? I’m not certain everyone in the last row heard it.”

“Don’t be like that”, Hashirama gently scolded, placing a glowing hand on Madara’s chest. He knew he probably overreacted; it would be just as sufficient to look after the Uchiha’s condition when the counting was over. But after all that happened, all the pain and struggle, the fear of losing him, he found he just couldn’t. Madara’s health had become so much better, even though Hashirama still failed to negate the cause of his condition. They had gotten rid of the fluids and mucus that had slowly suffocated him, but Hashirama still wasn’t certain what was responsible for such amounts of it. Whatever it was, Madara had been suffering from it since he was a child, probably even before that -he just hadn’t noticed. It felt like a

personal failure he was unable to do either, restore Madara's eyesight and rip out whatever illness stuck to him.

Meanwhile, the shinobi of Konoha watched their two leaders silently. Uchiha Madara's temper was infamous for a reason; once it got triggered, it certainly proofed the be the best option to simply fuck off as quietly as possible. Now however, the Uchiha leader's eyes fell halfway shut, as Hashirama seeped medical chakra through his clothes into his no longer aching chest.

However, when his name was stated yet another time, Hashirama's influence came to an end. His eye started twitching again and he shoved off the Senju's gentle hands. What the hell were people thinking?! He couldn't… He wouldn't… Just no! And who the hell did even- "I'm sorry for voting for you, Madara-sama!" Fushito. Of course, Fushito. Oh, that rotten bastard! If he wasn't standing in the middle of a crowd, Madara would burn him to a crisp. "After everything you've done for us, I couldn't just vote for Hashirama-sama! I promise I will make it up to you!" The crowd around the young Uchiha-father started murmuring, some agreeing, some debating, others just glad someone besides Hibiko -who was a Senju!- had openly declared yoting for Madara. It had seemed so unjust. The Uchiha-leader had done so much for their village, protected it from the Kyuubi even, and now he wasn't even considered as an option for Hokage? Until just a few minutes ago, no one had even known Madara-sama had right out refused to be listed as a possibility. Even those who voted for Hashirama had been at least confused once they had taken a look at the ballot.

"You know, I was going to list you as future team-leader for the academy-graduates", Madara bellowed, crossing his arms. "I'm going to make sure your team will be the loudest, most annoying one!"

Fushito laughed. His daughter would go to school in the academy once it opened but teaming him up with her would be very unfair to the other ones in his team. Besides, he was always up to a challenge. Anyway, he didn't regret voting his clan-head for even a second.

During all the fuss, Tobirama and Izuna continued counting. Izuna's plan seemed to work out so far. Quite contradicting to his older brother's believes, a lot of people had voted against Hashirama and more than a few openly declared they wished for Madara instead. He wondered if there were Senju amongst them other than Hibiko, who simply saw Hashirama as the wood-head he was.

"Uchiha Madara", Tobirama declared once more, putting aside the ballot. They were halfway done by now and the younger Senju took out another paper, suppressing a sigh and stating "Nishi."

"I'd rather vote for my cat than any of you both", Sarana snarked, sounding not even sorry. "He likes to sneak into peoples' beds. That's more than either of you managed so far."

"I won't sneak into anyone's bed", Hashirama protested, aghast, making the old Uchiha huff. "And that's the issue you fail to see every day."

"He wouldn't even have to sneak", Itsuko huffed, puffing on his pipe. Next to him, Hibiko snickered, stealing the Uchiha's pipe. One day, they would get it. And then, she could drop

dead, finally.

Hashirama's head slammed downwards. Why did elders have to be so cruel? The Senju ones were already bad, but it turned out Uchiha could be even worse.

On the next ballot, someone had chosen to vote for both, the Uchiha and Senju leader, starting a debate whether two Hokage were actually an option. However, the murmuring quieted down as soon as Izuna rose from his seat. "The count of votes for Senju Hashirama to become Hokage: fifty-two percent!" The murmuring started again but stopped as soon as Izuna spoke up again. "The count of votes against Senju Hashirama to become Hokage: thirty-one percent!" And finally… "The count of votes for Uchiha Madara to become Hokage: seventeen percent!" Nishi went unnoticed, Sarana thought with a huff. Apparently, votes for cats didn't count.

Madara breathed out in relief. Even though it was a close call, Hashirama was officially elected by now. Thank Kami that was over and done with. Besides- "No!" He looked up. "What?"

Hashirama was frowning, an expression too serious for his normal cheerful self now clouding his features. "The election would have been a close call anyhow, but since you refused to officially partake, there's a high possibility people would have voted differently otherwise. Besides, nearly every fifth voted for you, even though your name wasn't even listed on the ballot. If we did another run, I'm certain you would be the winner!"

"That doesn't matter, you empathic asshole", the Uchiha leader shot back, crossing his arms. "You can't just call another election if the outcome of the first doesn't suit your expectations. That's not how democracy works."

"Neither is the unequal position of only one clan-head listed on the ballot", Hashirama countered. "People want you to be Hokage at least as much as they'd vote for me! You saved the village while I was gone, without you Konohagakure wouldn't have been founded at all! Can't you see?"

"No!", Madara yelled back, his temper rising along with his chakra, azure waves of it making his hair billow as he balled his hands into fists, facing the Senju leader. "I can't *see*! And I probably will never again! I wouldn't even be able to read the documents placed in front of me! Face it, Hashirama! A blind clan-head is a useless one, and a blind Hokage even more so. If even you were unable to heal my eyes, no one will!"

"Take mine, then!" A heavy silence spread across the crowd as Izuna placed his papers on the desk in front of him and turned around, facing his older brother. "If your failing eyesight is what keeps you from even considering to become Hokage, take mine."

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Eyeballs everywhere.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I don't mean both, of course", Izuna clarified, as soon as his brother opened his mouth. "Just take one. We'll have Hashirama transplant it, he'll do fine. After all-" "Absolutely not!" Madara grit his teeth. "Where does this inane idea even come from? I would never-" "You're suffering!" "I am fine!", the Uchiha leader bellowed. "Don't you dare to think that just because I'm blind-" Right on cue, his lungs clenched. They were alright again -or rather as much of that as they would ever be again due to Hashirama's constant treatment- but still tended to act up whenever he could use it the last. Damn him and his fucked up body. While he coughed violently, Hashirama once more lowered a soothing hand covered in healing chakra on his aching chest.

"I can do well enough with one eye", Izuna attempted to reason. "Besides, if it were the other way round, I'm fairly certain you would insist to do the same."

"That's because *I* am the older brother", Madara growled, unceremoniously shoving Hashirama's palms off of him. "So, being the younger one strips me of any right to care for you?", Izuna shot back, before his tone gentled once more. "You and I, we're the only ones left. Do you have any idea how much it hurts? Watching you wearing yourself down, first for the clan, then the village… without you, I'd have no one left!" By now, the younger Uchiha's voice had risen, if only a little. "Ever since we were children, you always told me how being brothers means we're going to care for each other! But all the time, you take over the caring part, refusing for anyone to *take* care of you!" Anyone… but Hashirama. The Senju leader was the very first one in years (after years, after *years*) who had been able to truly… take care. Where everyone else (even himself, Izuna begrudgingly admitted) failed, Hashirama just… did. Outright refusing to take a No for an answer, he- "To be honest, I am not certain if even a transplantation would restore Madara's eye-sight."- was a backstabbing Senju. Izuna frowned, crossing his arms as he waited for Hashirama to elaborate. "Madara's visual nerve continues to degenerate, no matter how many times I regrow it or how much chakra I infuse. Even if I implanted a perfectly working eyeball, the failing nerve will block the neuro-signals."

Madara refrained from laughing in triumph. At least this once, Hashirama was- "However, maybe I could do-" "Nothing and that's final", the Uchiha leader snapped but was right out ignored by Hashirama who carefully grasped his face, while bringing his own way too close for comfort. "Wha-" "Izuna's and your chakra are extremely similar", the brunette clan-head

uttered. “Not only are you both Uchiha, but brothers… there might be chance-” “No.” “But-” “Like hell I will.” “Would you even consider-” “Fuck off.” “Madara!” “Hashirama!”

While the crowd followed their leaders’ banter with nothing but the uttermost interest -after all, most of them had seen the two go at each other’s throats during countless battles- Tobirama’s blank face was a certain hint he was about to snap someone’s neck. Preferably his brother’s. It would regrow, after all. Probably. Maybe. He would take the risk.

“You could take one of mine, Madara-sama!” The Uchiha leader frowned, facing whomever had called out to him from out of the crowd. “If you don’t want to take Izuna’s… we’re cousins, after all!” Ah. Haruika, that treacherous bastard.

“Mine could work, too”, Uzumihi offered, making her leader growl. “I won’t take anyone’s eyes, you morons”, he snapped, making his people sigh. Of course… Madara was a true leader, willing to give his very life for the sake of his clan… but right out refused to let others do the same.

However, when he turned around, Hashirama had already covered his brother’s eye with one hand, green chakra seeping into the visual organ. “It might work”, he muttered. “I’m not certain, though. If his body repels the transplant or the nerve degenerates again, it’s useless.”

“What do you think you’re doing”, the older Uchiha barked, making Izuna look up, Hashirama’s palm sliding off his eye in the process.

“If there’s a chance, I’ll take it”, his brother stated. “My eyes might fit, they might not. But…” He armed himself for another rebuff, before continuing. “If they don’t, I’ll jut take them back. I’ll just…” He shook his head. “I just can’t do *nothing*! And it hurts, seeing you reject everyone trying to help, even me. It hurts way more, than a missing eye ever could. Because I know if it was me, you wouldn’t do but cut out both of your eyes yourself and yet refuse to let me give you even one. I’m your brother, Madara! It’s my duty to protect you just as much as it’s yours to protect me. Because that’s what brothers *do*!”

Madara sighed warily. His shoulders sagged as though the world’s weight was pulling them down -which probably would be the smaller of the two evils for him. “If this doesn’t work, Hashirama will re-implant your eye immediately”, he ordered quietly, making his younger brother gape. “You mean you’re…”

Madara closed his eyes for a moment. Taking this offer went against everything he held dear, every value, every… everything. Taking half of his last brother’s eyesight, for the sole purpose of restoring his own wouldn’t even be worth considering… if Izuna hadn’t made clear the situation as it was made him suffer even worse. His little brother wouldn’t be happy unless he regained his sight -even though the cost was half of his own. He hoped, deeply desperately hoped, this wouldn’t work out. If he remained blind even with his brother’s eye, they could just be done with this whole matter and move on. Izuna would take his eye back and everything would be the way it was meant to. But still… “Not here.” Like hell he would have Hashirama take Izuna’s eye in front of both of their clans. That certainly was not something to be witnessed in public.

Tobirama got up from the chair he had waited in until the discussion had been settled, one way or the other. “Elections are closed!”

Sitting in Hashirama’s medical laboratory was strange no matter the circumstances. However, knowing what was coming, Madara felt more like a trapped mouse than anything else. “We don’t have to do this, Izuna. We could always just-” “You agreed to try!” He did. And fucking shit, he regretted it. This wasn’t right at all. “Please, Izuna.” No, he certainly wasn’t above begging at this point, however, his little brother wouldn’t have any of it. “No! We’re doing this, Aniki! If it doesn’t work, I’ll take the eye back and we’ll never talk about it again. But if it does-” Kami, he just wished it wouldn’t.

The room was painstakingly sterile, white floor, white walls, four cabinets filled with neatly arranged utensils, a large bookshelf, two chairs and a table Hashirama just disinfected. All in all, the room was quite large for only keeping such a small amount of furniture.

Tobirama had tactfully retreated, standing in front of the second shelf with crossed arms. He had offered to leave, however; Izuna had declined. The younger Senju was a part of this, too, and besides they agreed it would be wise to have at least one witness who was uninvolved in the medical process itself. Madara and Izuna had each taken place on one of the seats, facing each other.

Hashirama placed two petri dishes on the table next to them, one carefully cleaned, the other, larger one filled with a clear liquid. The small scalpel and two tissues probably wouldn’t even be needed but Hashirama had decided to better be safe than sorry. Especially if it considered Uchiha and their eyes.

“I am ready”, Hashirama declared, carefully pulling on a pair of latex gloves before covering his hands in glowing green chakra.

“Izuna-” Madara attempted again, only be met with the strangely soothing tone of his younger brother: “If this doesn’t work out, we’ll switch back right after. But we have to try, Aniki.”

“No, we don’t”, Madara murmured quietly. “We don’t have to do anything, we can just-” “All clear”, Izuna interrupted, facing Hashirama. Just this once, he had to take all responsibility out of his brother’s hands, as Madara would rather die than hurt him -the very same he felt about his older brother. Sometimes, you just couldn’t have it all.

Hashirama carefully covered Madara’s left eye-socket in medical chakra, making sure to numb the pain receptors before starting to work. He knew how harsh this whole matter was on his best friend -he didn’t want to imagine the same scenario including him and Tobirama- but him (and Tobirama, even though he had carefully kept his mind silent, after all this was between the Uchiha brothers) agreed with Izuna on this matter. It was… hard, watching Madara batter himself each and every day, believing himself to not be good enough, no matter how much he sacrificed for their sake. He deserved to be Hokage, so much more than Hashirama did -after all, he hadn’t had been the one to fight until he almost dropped dead for the sake of his people, fought his own clansmen for their village, only to fight the Kyuubi

until he permanently lost his eyesight… There was so much more, so very much more in this selfless man that was Madara, but he just refused to see any of it, deeming himself right out worthless. He didn't deserve it, didn't deserve any of it.

Carefully (he didn't remember ever being so painstakingly cautious in his life) he cut and sealed the blood vessels nurturing the organ with just millimetre-messing chakra blades, separating it from its hold and checking everything over, before slowly taking the eyeball out of its socket.

"You can even see it", he murmured, frowning in fascination. "The visual nerve is absolutely degenerated, see, Izuna?" He carefully showed the younger Uchiha the failing tissue. "This is the visual's nerve-connection", he showed, pointing at a small string of vessels. "See the black spots? That's where necrosis has set in. The tissue just keeps degenerating, until the nerve system has rotten away. I'll clean the remaining tissue in Madara's eye-socket, we don't want the degeneration process to set in deeper and spread once we set in your-" "Hashirama", Izuna interrupted sharply, before the Senju leader could go on. Madara's face had gotten ashen on the possibility of the degeneration process transferring to his brother's implanted eye. If that meant Izuna couldn't even take back his sight in case this wouldn't work out, there was no way in hell he would- "Right. Sorry", the Senju leader quickly cut in, carefully setting Madara's damaged eye in the liquid filled petri dish. Then, he turned to Madara once more, covering his now empty eye-socket in chakra and carefully removing all the rests of damaged material, before turning back to Izuna. He opened his mouth to ask once more if the younger Uchiha was certain about this -after all, there was the possibility this could permanently damage his own eye if the necrosis truly spread, however, was silenced by Izuna's venomous glare. No more questioning. Got it.

He surrounded Izuna's eye -the left one, since that was the one he had taken from Madara as well- with medical chakra, before carefully cutting off the visual's nerve connection before re-sealing it -a step he hadn't even needed before, considering Madara's nerve had been completely degenerated- and separating blood-vessels, before loosening the tissue. Then, he took out the eyeball, carefully watching for any injuries, before something minor -and yet so utterly important- occurred to him. This was… this was probably the first time any Uchiha let someone who was not one of their clan willingly not just touch but right out *remove* their eyes. This was… It suddenly felt like he hadn't even realised the importance and ground-braking meaning of what he was doing. Unable to supress the need to swallow heavily, his gaze fell to the small organ he was delicately holding. "What is it, Hashirama?"

The Senju leader nearly flinched as Madara's voice tore through his thoughts. "Nothing", he denied quickly. "Just a check a quick check-up."

He turned back to the older Uchiha, carefully renewing the chakra-coat around his eye-socket. Then, he cautiously opened the lid above the hollowed bone and set the transplant into its new place. Carefully, he connected blood-vessels and tissue, before re-growing the visual nerve. "Keep it closed", he murmured, carefully waiting for any signs of corrosion, as the connection was set. The chakra-flow had already started, perfectly accepting the transplantation. No signs of necrosis (he would have immediately removed the transplant if that was the case; he wouldn't let Izuna's eye come to harm).

“The chakra-flow is even more intense than usual”, he noted, before removing his hands and taking a step back, making the brothers face each other once more. “All right then, Madara. Try to open.”

Carefully, the Uchiha opened his lids, blinking once at the sheer mass of light that was just intensified by the white walls reflecting it. He could feel his pupils -his one pupil- adjusting and immediately knew he had just given away the outcome. “It’s working!” Izuna beamed at him, his left eye just a shallow space. It made him sick to know he was responsible for his little brother’s cripple. “It’s working”, he confirmed, blinking once more as his sight turned sharp -if a little two-dimensional due to his missing sight on the right side. No use in denying at this point.

“Let’s go through it, then”, Hashirama offered. “Sight-rate?” “Full capacity”, Madara answered, making Hashirama nod and write something down on a small scroll.

“Next step?”, the Senju asked and Madara had three tomoe spinning in his Sharingan. Maybe a little too fast, Hashirama noted. “Full capacity”, the Uchiha leader reported once more.

“Next step?” Hashirama asked again, this time more careful. Madara and Izuna both had awoken their Mangekyou Sharingan, the very first Uchiha to develop their eyes this far - Madara being the first to pay the ultimate price none knew of before. He should be able to use it, but at this point, all they did was highly hypothetical, even for him. There was no history they could rely on, no experience or reports. Hesitating for a moment, Madara finally reached for the familiar feeling of power beneath his eyes, preparing himself for the pain that would inevitably follow.

The world erupted and Madara heard himself gasp, as he supported himself on the table even though he was already sitting. “Aniki!” Somewhere above, Izuna had leapt out of his seat and taken the single step to his brother’s side. Colour. Movement. Everything moved. *Everything*. Splits of dust glittering in the sunlight. Hashirama’s hair shining in a dozen shades of beautiful umbra. Glass reflecting the artificial light. “Double capacity”, he somehow brought out, feeling the pattern in his -Izuna’s- iris twirl. “Overwhelming.”

Hastily, Hashirama scribbled some more. If even Madara admitted this was too much, it was above anything they had prepared for. He needed- “The pattern!”, Izuna interrupted his train of thought, having sunken to his knees next to his brother, “The pattern changed!”

In a flash, Hashirama was at his side. If there was someone on this earth who was more familiar with Madara’s Mangekyou Sharingan than Izuna, it was himself. And indeed, the younger Uchiha was right. Where Madara’s Mangekyou pattern had consisted of three circles in a round, it now connected to the edges of his iris, complicating the original. Even Tobirama had moved from his spot, now standing next to them, victimising the outcome as well.

“Let it go if the pain’s too much”, Izuna told him, however; Madara shook his head, slowly seeming to pull himself together again. “No pain”, he whispered. “It doesn’t hurt at all.”

“May I?”, Hashirama asked, half-alarmed, half-amazed and upon the Uchiha’s single nod, carefully grasped his face, surrounding the working eye with medical chakra once more. “The

chakra-flow is immense", he muttered. "But… the connection is way more stable than it was before. As if… everything has re-ordered." He went back to scribbling on his scroll while Madara shook his head a few times as though to get rid of an unwanted track of thoughts. It was clear he needed some time to process the outcome of their experiment.

"Well", Izuna finally noted, "I guess the transplantation was a success." More than that. Way more than that. However, they had to do further research on the matter to be certain. Hashirama nodded, setting down his pen, facing the younger Uchiha. "Could you implant Aniki's eye? Even if it won't work, I don't want to run around with an empty socket. I'd rather not look like an ugly pirate."

Hashirama froze for a moment, considering, before he nodded. "Give me a moment to clean the tissue", he requested, switching into a new pair of gloves. "I want to get rid of the necrosis before the transplantation."

Izuna nodded, attention switching to his brother once more, who had leaned back in his seat, closing his eyes. "I need to get accustomed", he murmured. "Just… Give me a moment. I'm sorry, Izuna."

"Stop apologising", his little brother told him, shaking his head. "I'm just glad it worked. There is no use in berating yourself; I would have Hashirama switch our eyes in your sleep, if you'd refused today." Madara couldn't supress a smile, if a little pained. "That sounds way too likely", he sighed, opening his -Izuna's- eye once more, trying to take in the sheer impact of it.

"Please take a seat", Hashirama gently prodded, now done with cleaning the remains of Madara's eye. He covered Izuna's empty eye socket with chakra to soothe the tissue, before gently placing the eyeball in this new place. Then, he re-connected the blood-vessels and – "The visual nerve is reacting", he whispered, pausing his treatment. Madara's head shot up. "Take it out! I won't have Izuna's visual nerves degenerate the way mine did!"

"It doesn't degrade", Hashirama objected. "It's… building up, even without medical treatment. The connection is already set… no sign of necrosis so far. Let me heal off the remaining blood vessels… Keep your eye closed." If the nerves re-connected themselves… even Hashirama didn't know what this would lead to. Izuna's body was accepting the implant alarmingly well at this rate.

Carefully, he fixed the last remaining issues, even though the younger Uchiha's body was already working on doing so itself. "Try to open your eye", he instructed and Izuna obediently blinked once. Then, once more. His pupils dilated before contracting as they got used to the light and finally met his brother's anxious gaze. "They're working", he whispered. "Aniki! They're working!"

Within the blink of an eye, Madara was by his side, right next to Tobirama, who had gotten even closer due to the last unpredictable events. "How are you feeling? Any pain? Blank spots?"

Izuna shook his head in denial. "Nothing. They're working… perfectly."

Hashirama hastily went back to his scroll, writing erratically, while Izuna swallowed once. Then, the black iris coloured red and three tomoe swirled. “Perfectly working”, he breathed out. “Just… Just as my own.”

The four of them carefully glanced at each other, even Tobirama who had kept out of all the process so far. Then, Izuna’s face scrunched in determination, as the three tomoe of his newly implanted eye started swirling once more, re-connecting into the pattern that defined his Mangekyou-Sharingan.

For a single moment, nothing happened. Then, the pattern changed, the straight circle around the iris re-forming into three smaller ones, complicating the original. Izuna’s hand flinched to his face and his eyes widened, as he staggered back in his seat.

“Kami…”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for any occuring mistakes. It's past 1 am, I'm deadly tired, but this chapter took long enough already.

So… I finally got rid of my brace. Hooray!
But seriously. There’s one thing with Uchiha I’ll never get in canon. Everyone knows how their Mangekyou Sharingan is awoken and it’s even stated the most powerful Uchiha would kill their best friends to get it. And it’s known you can get the Eternal Mangekyou Sharingan by implanting yourself another Uchiha’s Mangekyou Sharingan. And yet NOBODY does, because of plot-holes around Grand Canyon Size. Seriously. This is like… the most stupid thing ever. How about Random Uchiha A goes to Random Uchiha B and says “Hey you know how we’re both going blind? How about we switch eyes and have TWO sets of Eternal Mangekyou Sharingan?” Even if they weren’t as closely related as Madara and Izuna or Itachi and Sasuke (and thus, the transplantation wouldn’t work out quite as well), it would still be kinda better than going blind.
But yeah, that’s just me running around using logic ‘n shit.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Guess who finally becomes Hokage

Chapter Notes

Guess who's finally back with good news and bad news.
The good news: I got a now job. The bad news: I got a new job. Since it starts at 8am, my favourite creative writing time between 11pm and 1am is cancelled. Seems I need to re-schedule my life… ugh.
Anyway: We're finally getting a Hokage! I've been pondering for weeks (literally) how to solve this and finally got a solution. I really hope you'll like it.
That you all SO much for all of your awesome comments! You guys really keep me going!

"Do the other!" Izuna's voice cut the silence, making Madara frown. "I don't think that's a good idea", he cautioned. "We don't know anything about this, Izuna. We have no idea about potential side-effects or the long-term-" "Do you feel like there'll be any?", his little brother interrupted, making the older Uchiha pause, before frowning. "No", he realised hesitatingly. Indeed, the transplant felt impossible perfect, even more than his actual eyes ever had. His own remaining one felt strange to him, suddenly. Izuna nodded upon his older brother's answer, making it obvious he wouldn't take a No for an answer. "Neither do I", he simply agreed. Still…

"You'll tell me immediately, if something feels off", Madara commanded, glaring at his brother. And even though Uchiha Madara's glares were nothing easily brushed off -blind or not- Izuna just sighed. "Promise. Next one, Hashirama!"

The Senju laughed sheepishly. "I need a minute here, Izuna." While his older brother was still scribbling furiously on his scroll, Tobirama replaced the liquid that had kept Madara's eye with new one, before throwing away the two used pairs of gloves. Then, he took his place at the side-line once more, silently witnessing the act.

Finally done, Hashirama meanwhile took a new pair of latex gloves, before switching his attention back to his best friend. Carefully removing Madara's remaining own eye, he set it in the liquid filled petri dish, cautious to mirror his previous steps as closely as possible. Then, he transplanted Izuna's eye in the freed spot, this time waiting a moment before starting to infuse chakra. "The connection sets in by itself", he whispered in awe. "It takes longer and

doesn't heal off as clean, but your chakra-system is already adjusting." He helped the nerves connect more precisely, adjusted some last blood-vessels and stepped back. Madara opened his eyes, taking a few seconds to adjust himself to the new sensation. First switching to his Sharingan, before letting the Mangekyou-pattern form once more. This time it was no less intense just because he knew what was coming. If it came to the Sharingan and the Mangekyou Sharingan, two halves equalled so much more than the number of their pieces. The power of two eyes combined was way more intense than each one simply added; Sharingan -no matter how far evolved- always empowered each other. He took a deep breath, before slowly building up chakra as far as the small room allowed. Pieces of skeleton formed around him, surrounding the two sets of siblings, as well as the table in order to not knock it over. He wouldn't be able to build up his Susano'o any farther without utterly wracking havoc and destroying the nearest wall, however; this was enough. No pain… No raging fire burning away his insides. He closed his eyes, devouring the sensation. The absence of agony wasting away his body, the pure feeling of ultimate power. As it should be. As it was meant to be. He forcefully kept his chakra-construct from building up further, before making it finally falter. If even this, the ultimate power of their eyes, didn't corrode them... nothing would.

Hashirama mourned the loss of chakra around them as soon as Madara had let his Susano'o vanish. As strange as being entirely surrounded by another's chakra felt… Hashirama ceased the frown that was beginning to form on his forehead. He knew people tended to describe Madara's chakra as foul, suffocating and boiling hot, but to him it had never felt that way. Instead, all he felt was warmth, comfort and… affection? Yes, of course, he would. Madara was his best friend after all. Even though their friendship had been harsh at (most) times, the Uchiha was still the one person besides Tobirama who entirely understood him, knew him in a way no one else in his clan did. So, why was he still feeling- "-rama!" "Huh?" The older Senju looked up, meeting the equally annoyed gazes of his brother and best friend. "I told you twice now, it's fine! No corrosion, no pain, nothing. You can switch Izuna's now."

"Right." Hashirama blinked once, before changing his gloves again, carefully treating the younger Uchiha's eye-socket and transplanting Madara's eye afterwards, connecting the vessels and nerves. "All done", he declared, stepping back as Izuna opened his eyes. Unlike his older brother, he refrained from summoning his Susano'o. Madara had way more practise in its use -even though he had never truly summoned the whole avatar before his clash with the Kyuubi- and Izuna really didn't want to trash the room.

"Mind if I check on you tomorrow, Izuna? Madara, I'd like to take a look at your lungs in the evening, if you don't mind." Hashirama went back to his scroll again. "I'd also like to run some tests, if that's alright with you. We could-" "Anija", Tobirama interrupted his older brother, knowing how this would work out if he didn't, "Before you get ahead of yourself: We still need to name a Hokage -and we need to do so before the Yamanaka join in five days."

"Oh, shit." Hashirama groaned. "Can't we do this tomorrow? There's still enough time to-" "No!", his little brother barked, a vein on his temple twitching. "We need to figure this out today! The ceremony is tomorrow, after all, and things need to be over before the other clans join."

The Senju leader turned to Madara, who had gotten up from his seat and stood next to him, arms crossed. “No”, the raven told him, before he had even opened his mouth. “Madara! There’s no reason for you to not even *consider* becoming Hokage!” Hashirama crossed his arms as well, mirroring his best friend’s stubborn stance. “Your eyesight is restored -even more so-, your lungs are clear, you are nearly healthy. I’ll just have to take a look at your lungs every few days to get rid of any occurring mucus. Just-” “No, Hashirama.” The Uchiha huffed. “You came up with that Hokage-Bullshit, you deal with it! I won’t sacrifice any of my remaining sanity to deal with even more paperwork. And just because I regained my eyesight -which doesn’t mean it’s permanent, mind you- I won’t let you step back from this.”

“But Madara-” “You’re no boss of mine”, the Uchiha leader barked, turning around. “So, fuck off, Hashirama.” With that, he stormed off, leaving behind his pouting best friend.

“Well”, Izuna noted, supressing a sigh, “So much for making Aniki reconsider.” Why did he have to be so freakishly stubborn about this? First his conviction about the missing trust of Konoha’s people. Then, his missing sight. Now, his outright refusal. At this point, Izuna was quite certain that whatever further reason they brought forth would simply be declined. Madara didn’t deem himself either worthy or fit for officially leading the village and if his thick-headed older brother set his mind onto something, getting him off track might proof to be nothing short of impossible.

Hashirama simply stared after his best friend. “No boss of yours, eh?”

At exactly noon the day after, the people of their village had once more gathered on the same plaza they already had after the (quite frustrating) elections-procedure yesterday. Except this time, the five elders had taken place on the small stage next to their clan-leaders and co-leaders. None of them knew the outcome of yesterday’s mess -referring to both, the Hokage elections and Izuna’s demand considering his brother’s blindness.

Hashirama stepped forth, eyes meeting the silent crowd in front of him. “First things first”, he began, grateful for the rather pleasing start of his speech, “I am glad to inform you; Izuna’s noble offer was not wasted. Madara’s sight has been fully restored -and to our utter surprise, Izuna’s as well after we implanted his brother’s eyes.” A murmur spread across the crowd, making the Senju raise his hand soothingly. “We need to figure out the genetic details making this possible, however; this is not why we have gathered once more today. I simply didn’t want you to worry more than necessary.”

Hashirama took another breath, knowing what was coming. “With his eyesight fully restored, there is nothing keeping Madara from taking over the duties as Hokage-” “Eat a dick, Hashirama!”, the Uchiha leader spat, looking as though he forcefully refrained from knocking his best friend all across Fire-Country with a baseball-bat. Hashirama’s sleeves started burning and with a silent sigh, he put out the licking flames before his robe was utterly ruined. “- If he wished to”, the Senju continued as though nothing had happened. “However, as this is not the case and the village is in dire need of an official leader…” He bowed humbly, long locks hiding his face, “It would be my honour to follow the outcome of yesterday’s elections and take over the duty and pleasure of being the First Hokage of our village… If you will have me.”

For a few moments dragging far too long, nothing happened. Hashirama remained in his place, deeply bowed in front of his people, waiting for their final verdict.

The cheering started slow, maybe too much so. Then, it spread across the crowd, building and gaining strength, until the people of Konoha, Senju and Uchiha both, called out in approval of the Senju leader… no, the village leader. Screams of joy, of love, of comfort for their Shoudaime Hokage, the First Shadow of Fire.

All the while, Hashirama didn't move an inch, still bowing as deeply as possible to the people of Konoha, to his people… *their* people. Madara's and his. Cheering for a brighter future, a future in unity. As they had always dreamed they one day would.

Behind him, Itsuko and Makoto stepped closer, carrying a heavy white mantle they lowered on his shoulders. Akiyama and Serana finally set the large red headwear on his hair, before Hibiko raised her voice, ever strong despite her old age of nearly ninety winters: "Senju… Uchiha. People of Konohagakure! United we stand, united we are stronger than ever. And now, we finally have elected a leader of our new village, a leader for our united strength. So, cheer, people of Konoha! Cheer and scream in joy, for our future is bright, now more than ever!"

And scream they did.

And cheer they did.

Deafening shouts for their Shoudaime, for the one that would lead them from now, who would form this new age, this new era.

Finally, Hashirama raised, standing tall as he watched the crowd below him. A nearly unbidden smile tugged on the corners of his face. "When I was just a child, I met that strange boy at the Nagishawa-river." He didn't even hear the murmuring that was spreading amongst the crowd at those words. Never their two leaders had talked about how they met, it was merely known they had to have at some point. Everything more than this was mere rumours, making this the first confession about their shared history. Unaware, the new Hokage smiled a little wider as the mental image of a wild-haired boy in a too large yukata angrily gesticulated at him for whatever reason occurred to him this time. "We used to dream… that wild, raven-haired boy and me. About a place we could protect our little brothers in… and it took years and years and now… Now, we did it." Hashirama's smile got even wider as he continued. "He wanted me to take over the mantle as the village's leader, thus I did. However; I can't do this alone. I never could. When we created this position, three Advisors were meant to be by its side, since not even the Hokage should make important decisions on his own. As such, I am in desperate need of someone by my side. And I want that one to be the boy I dreamed with, the boy I sparred with, the man I fought and created a village with." His smile got even wider and he turned around a little. "What do you think, Madara?"

"I think you're a moron", the Uchiha leader shot back mercilessly, arms crossed. However, Hashirama merely chucked. "Then, I shall be your moron", he teased, not even flinching at the insult. "If you will have me."

Madara raised one of his fine eyebrows as he faced the new Hokage in his flashing robes. “If that’s your idea of a formal dress-code, you’ll need all the help you can get”, he informed his best friend, whose smile transformed into one of his full-flagged grins, before he pulled the Uchiha leader into a bone-crushing hug, making him splutter in a way ranging somewhere between angry and embarrassed. The Senju was nearly a full head taller than him (even though his mountain of hair nearly made up for that) and Madara’s attempts to free himself from his best friend’s broad chest were rather unsuccessful. “You’re embarrassing as fuck! Hashirama! You hear me, you big buffoon? Let me go or I swear, I’ll burn your stupid Bonsai down!” Unfortunately, Hashirama didn’t have any fucks left to give, at least not if it was about caring for dignity, least of all his own.

When the Senju leader finally stepped back, he was smiling widely at the raven. “Then, I won’t need anyone else”, he declared.

“Wha- Oh, no, no, no. That’s not what we’re doing, Hashirama. The idea was three advisors, not just whatever stupid ideas your flowery brain comes up with! I won’t-” “You already said yes”, Hashirama interrupted, sighing internally. It seemed, he had to pull *that* card, if he couldn’t convince his best friend. However, he just *couldn‘t* do this alone, never had. He needed Madara, needed him by his side, as he had from the very beginning. And he had wanted for Madara to be at the top, had wanted him to lead the village. However, as usual things hadn’t worked out the way he had intended. His best friend right out refused to be even considered as a possibility for the village leader. However, Hashirama wouldn’t let him get out of *this*, too. And he wouldn’t step back now. “Tobirama and Izuna -at the very least one of them- will be needed in the village, whenever we can’t stay here. And I need you, Madara. We both know I’m no good with negotiations and I happen to be quite naïve way too often. You’re the one without whom this village wouldn’t even exist! And I need you by my side to run it!”

“You need *someone* by your side, to keep you from chasing rainbows. Tobirama will do just fine, if you insist on-” “I need *you!*” Hashirama barely refrained from crying out in despair. How didn’t he see? How was the Uchiha with his praised Sharingan so very blind he didn’t see how much Hashirama depended on him? It seemed everyone else did, except for the one who mattered most.

“You know what? Go fuck yourself! You’re no Boss of mine!”

“But I am.”

Madara stopped dead in his metaphorical tracks, lips halfway parted in another argument. It was almost comical as the usually so composed Uchiha’s eyes widened upon the realisation that yes, indeed Hashirama as the village’s leader and Hokage was exactly that: His Boss. The Uchiha grit his teeth, awaiting the inevitable: Hashirama’s order telling him to take his new position, as was his right as Hokage of their village. His eyes hardened, however; the only thing they met was the Senju leader’s soft smile. “So… What say you, Madara? Are you willing to stay by my side -as your Hokage’s advisor and my best friend? Because they both need you, now more than ever.”

The raven blinked. “You’re one sappy bastard”, he muttered, refusing to meet the Shoudaime’s gentle eyes. “Fine. But only because I owe you for saving my life. And Izuna’s

eyes."

Hashirama stepped forth once more, and this time his hug was gentler than the last. He closed his eyes as he buried his face in long, raven locks, softer than they had any right to be. They smelled like smouldering ashes of a warming fire. Of comfort… and home.

Out of the shadows at the plaza's opposite side, a darkly clothed figure watched closely as the two clan-leaders hugged each other (well, to be precise only one of them actually took an active part in that; the Uchiha simply let him).

He had set his hopes on that particular Uchiha, ever since the boy had become clan-head. He had managed to awake his Mangekyou Sharingan; the first one ever since the ancient ages. Back then, things certainly hadn't turned out the way they were intended. Indra didn't win his final fight against Ashura; in fact, the outcome had been the exact opposite. Which would have been half as bad if that stupid boy would have taken his brother's precious eyes instead of burning them along with the rest of his battered remains. That blasted younger son had ruined everything not once, but twice!

He could count himself lucky Indra had sired offspring, otherwise the truth-seeing eyes and their power would have been lost for all eternity, making it impossible to save Mother from her prison!

But still. Without being fully awoken, even the Sharingan was useless and not a single Uchiha had managed to even evolve their eyes to a complete Mangekyou Sharingan.

At least not until a few years ago when he felt their awakening power calling to him from not one, but two clan-members. However; he had nearly given up hope on those as well. The older one was too sick; he would die long before he even stood a chance of awakening the Rinnegan even if he decided to intervene directly. And the younger boy simply wasn't strong enough.

Thus, he had already condemned himself to another indefinite period of waiting… until he had heard rumours about Senju and Uchiha joining forces.

It seemed, not only had the older boy -the one he had set his hopes into- survived but also gained the ultimate stage of the Sharingan! How very unexpected… how very convenient. And even more so, once he finally recognised the chakra he possessed. Indra's incarnation certainly had been a surprise -a very welcome one, that is. Once he realised whose chakra circled in the raven-haired man, recognising the other one wasn't too difficult. How very convenient once more to have Ashura right in front of him, too… except it now turned out it wasn't.

If was obvious, this Ashura was way more protective of his Indra, than the original one ever was. And worse, the affection seemed mutual, since the current Indra hadn't even pushed the other man off him. Instead, he seemed to tighten the hug that had been forced upon him.

It would be no use attempting to steal Indra's eyes and the other Uchiha's Eternal Mangekyou Sharingan just wouldn't suffice. He wasn't one for an open fight and very aware these two needed to be handled with caution. However; he wouldn't step back now. He finally had found the ultimate eyes he had been after for ages! And on top of that, Ashura's chakra was right in front of him, too, as well. He would have a busy schedule, it seemed.

Soundlessly, Zetsu reunited with the shadows he had emerged from.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Cultural differences.
Also, a lot of other differences.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Side by side, the Hokage and his (only) advisor walked through their village. The Yamanaka had joined just yesterday, moved into the houses Hashirama had prepared beforehand, following the agreements they had made during their meetings and negotiations. Since the Yamanaka clan didn't want any kind of celebration following their joining, the whole affair had gone rather quietly; merely the leaders and co-leaders of the Uchiha and Senju had welcomed the clan. The Yamanaka-compound was more similar to the Senju's, though not as largely sprawled (but let's be honest, spreading out farther than those grass-lovers would be really difficult unless one decided to live as a hermit in the middle of the fucking forest).

Hashirama knocked twice on the simple door of the clanhead's house, patiently waiting until it was opened. "A beautiful day, isn't it?", he asked, smiling brightly and making his best friend roll his eyes. "Stop making Smalltalk, Hashirama. Besides, everyday is beautiful if one asks your sun-kissed ass."

"Some more than others", the Senju argued laughing, making Madara sigh exasperated. "Sometimes I really wonder if there's a brain inside that thick skull of yours or just a large, wobbly glob." "Technically-" "Oh, no, we're not having *that* conversation." "But *you* said-" The door opened and instead of arguing further, Hashirama smiled at the Yamanaka-clanhead who stood in the entry. "Ichigo-san. Good morning! How was your first night with us?"

The Yamanaka clanhead was young, however; neither Madara nor Hashirama should be the ones talking. Yamanaka Ichigo was a rather clean man, his hair so blonde it seemed almost bleached. His eyes were of a sharp icy-blue, seeming to pierce straight through them. He was just a few years older than them, maybe two or three however already considered a genius - which meant something by Yamanaka-standards. Unlike Madara or Hashirama, he wasn't known for his capabilities in battle; however, his way of dealing with his opponents' sanity tended to be… effective, to name it nicely.

The Yamanaka-leader carefully observed the two men for a moment. Uchiha and Senju had been arch-enemies; oceans of blood separating them for centuries. When rumour had spread about the two most powerful clans in the Land of Fire joining, most of the other clans didn't even believe them, too impossible was even the idea. However; when rumours turned out to be true, Ichigo soon realised what joining their union could mean: The Yamanaka had

confederated with neither, Senju nor Uchiha, meaning there was no bad blood with the other clan. Joining with the unity of both would undoubtly bring a whole new level of safety, stability and -hopefully- peace.

“Some of us are still weary, however; we all happen to be relieved we were able to finally join Konohagakure. We wish to thank you again for preparing all of this.”

Hashirama laughed -maybe a little sheepishly. “I just grew the houses. You should rather thank Madara, Tobirama and Izuna, they’re-” “You’re the Hokage, of course you’re responsible”, the Uchiha leader huffed, throwing the Senju a sour glance that easily overpowered Ichigo’s stare- not that Hashirama seemed to notice that. “But you and Tobirama-” “No.” “I just wanted to clarify that-” “No!” “Madara!” “Fuck you!”

A small cloud slammed onto Hashirama’s head, raining sadly above him, as the Senju leader sniffed theatrically. “I just think it’s thanks to you everything went so smooth.”

Madara rolled his eyes. “Stop being pathetic, you ninny. I can’t believe I even know you.”

Ichigo carefully watched the two clan-leaders. During their negotiations, it had already been obvious Hashirama heavily relied on his younger brother and the Uchiha clanhead (which had come as a big surprise considering their clans’ blood-drenched history) however, watching these two interact this… *intimate* was strange, to say at least. They seemed to be close in a way two leaders of clans fighting to the death not even half a year ago should never truly be. “Nonetheless, we are grateful-” “*Ashura!*”

The three clanleaders flinched as the voice tore through their eardrums. It seemed to echo through the village, shake the trees, and Madara cast out his senses, instantly scanning the environment for chakra. “That’s not the Kyuubi”, Hashirama asserted, instantly turning to Madara who had already determined directions.

“North-East, approaching fast”, he exclaimed. Hashirama turned around, facing a few Yamanaka who had left their houses upon the bone-wrecking scream. “Tell the others to stay behind. We’ll take care of this. Madara!” Without even bothering to reply, the Uchiha jumped off like a crossbow being fired, Hashirama right after him… as well as Ichigo.

“Isn’t Hokage-sama supposed to stay in the village”, Madara mocked, however, Hashirama merely frowned. He would never let Madara face a Bijuu alone -and it had to be, for what else could it- and besides… “That was my name.” The Uchiha huffed. “That isn’t your name.”

“It certainly accords with the Kyuubi’s story”, Hashirama argued. Half a step behind them, Ichigo frowned. He had no idea what these two were up to. Facing a Bijuu -even though he was no sensor, the sheer amount of chakra they were racing towards was obvious- was a bad idea at any given day; at most it was a suicidal one. However… he wasn’t clanhead for nothing. It was his duty now, to help their new allies with the best of his abilities. And his duty as their leader to protect the Yamanaka.

For a few minutes, the three shinobi silently darted forward, following Madara who charged right to the immense source of charka barrelling in their direction. “Ichigo-san.” Hashirama

was the one to speak first. “We will most likely encounter a Bijuu, though I don’t know which one -except it won’t be the Nine-Tails. Do *not* attack or draw your weapons, unless Madara or I do so first.”

“Understood.” Not that he was too keen on facing a Tailed Beast at all. The murderous giants had no business with either, shinobi or civilians and despised humans in general. However, he didn’t get to ponder too much about why they were seeking one of them out, since they had gotten closer to the raging mass of charka charging in their direction. The Bijuu had destroyed everything in its path, bursting through the forest and had burned down the trees in its way. Hashirama nodded respectfully once they stopped in front of its towering, flaming form. “Two-Tails.”

“Ashura?” The Bijuu’s voice wavered as it echoed in the morning air and the enormous two-tailed cat bowed down to face the Senju leader. “It is you… and yet it is not.” The giant head lowered a little to be able to face the three shinobi better, uprooting a few trees in the process. “Do you remember me, Ashura? Do you remember my name?” It sounded so very hopeful yet at the same time expecting disappointment.

Hashirama shook his head. “I am not Ashura, as Madara is not Indra. We never even heard those names before Madara’s fight with the Kyuubi. I am sorry to disappoint you, Nibi.”

“You used to be my favourite brother.” The Bijuu’s words were quiet but somehow still booming. “I loved you best, more than anyone else of us. And when Kurama told me he found you… that after millennia, he found our brothers by some cruel twist of fate, I just couldn’t sit back and wait. And now, it seems you cannot even remember my name.”

“So…” Hashirama guessed, “You consider yourself our brother, as well?”

The Two-Tails blinked. “Brother? No. I am your sister, Ashura”, it -she- corrected, making Hashirama blink. “You’re a *girl?*”

The Nibi blinked once, too. “How does it matter?”, she asked and Hashirama eagerly opened his mouth to ask -Weren’t Tailed Beasts genderless? After all, they hadn’t been born naturally. Did that mean they could procreate? How about the other seven beasts they hadn’t met yet?- however; Madara’s heel crushed his toes rather painfully.

“What was that for”, he whined, making the Uchiha roll his eyes. “Because you’re a fucking idiot, that’s why”, he supplied, making his best friend pout.

“Kurama told me you created a village… Who leads it?”, the Nibi finally asked, not showing any of her inner turmoil upon Hashirama’s answer: “I do.” It seemed, history was bound be repeat once more, she painfully realised. Hopefully, Ashura didn’t have to kill his older brother this time; maybe he would see reason and cease- “Because Madara didn’t want to.”

The Two-Tails froze, burning eyes slowly meeting the Uchiha’s. “You did not… want to lead the village and the people?”, it echoed, making Madara cross his arms. “Why should I? My sanity barely hangs on a string as it is. I really don’t need even more shit piled on the top, even though it took long enough to hammer that into Hashirama’s thick skull.”

Maybe… Just maybe… the future wasn't set in stone, after all, the Nibi thought, feeling a small bud of hope blooming in her chest. "What about this one", she asked, attention switching to the Yamanaka clanhead who watched the whole affair sharply from the side line, not missing a single word.

"Ichigo-san leads the Yamanaka-clan", Hashirama explained. "They joined our village just yesterday. Isn't it great?" He beamed at the giant cat, whose sharp gaze rested on the blonde shinobi for a moment more, before switching back to the Senju leader. "I have no interest in human business, let alone in their clans. However; if you are happy about this man joining you, then I shall be as well, brother."

Hashirama's face fell a little. No interest, huh? "Then I guess you wouldn't want to join, either?", he asked, disappointment clearly visible on his face. "I already asked the Kyuu-Kurama, I mean. We built the village to ensure peace and end the fights. I know you d-argh!"

With a single kick, Madara had sent his best friend flying into a bunch of trees, snapping them as the Senju crashed into the wood of another one, before finally coming to a stop. "We already talked about this, you moron! It's not just us anymore! You can't just ask *another* Bijuu to join our village, no matter how much you want to. You're responsible for the Yamanaka now, as well! And it's only a matter of time until the Sarutobi are going to join, as well. Just because *I* agree with your sappy ass doesn't mean everyone else does, as well", he barked, crossing his arms. Hashirama was so very focussed on peace, spreading love and overcoming old hatred, he tended to forget not everyone was as forgiving or easy-going as him.

"You broke my ulna", the Shoudaime whined, pouting, as he got out of the splintered wood around him. He regrew the broken trees (stupid plant-lover he was), before joining the Uchiha leader once more, still pouting, as he single-handedly straightened the broken bone, healing it without even so much as a blink.

"I'd much rather break your skull sometimes", the raven shout back mercilessly, making his Kage's head drop as if hit with a massive rock from above. "It's always the same with you", he theatrically sniffed. "I should've made you Hokage."

"And I should've let you drown in the Nagishawa-river."

"We were kids", Hashirama cried. "Are you never going to let me down on that?"

Meanwhile, Ichigo's observant eyes didn't miss a single beat as he saw the rumours going about in the shinobi-clans in the Land of Fire confirmed. The Senju and Uchiha clanhead did indeed meet as children… however, that by far didn't explain the rest of the conversation he had been -was still- witnessing.

The Nibi finally spoke up, interrupting her brothers' bickering. "I am glad the millennia haven't changed you… Ashura. I always loved you best for your kind heart. Power never meant much to you, your only wish to obtain strength was rooted in your desire to protect your loved ones." She was quiet for a moment, pondering about her next words. "I can't accept your offer, though. Not yet. It is too soon. All that hatred, all the bad blood between me… between the nine of us… and the human race is still boiling and I fear I would make

you unhappy in long terms by agreeing. Give me some time, brother, to think about all of this… And maybe, I will agree, if the time is right."

Hashirama sighed. He really couldn't expect more; it was common knowledge the Tailed Beasts deeply detested the human race. But… "You're always welcome to visit."

"And visit I will", Matatabi promised. "Just as Kurama will… And the others. I know, because we loved you."

"You do realise you're damn lucky the Yamanaka don't insist on leaving the village after this?", Madara asked, taking a bite of his dango. The Hokage and his advisor had retreated to the Senju's house (due to the fact that Tobirama and Izuna were up to something in the Uchiha clanheads' house and that Hashirama had forgotten to water his Bonsai).

The Senju smiled. "I don't know what all that fuss is about", he insisted, sipping on his tea. Madara huffed, leaning back on his comfy chair in Hashirama's living room. His mane of hair clung to his face, still dripping wet after the shower he had taken. "I know you're basically the two-legged embodiment of peace and harmony" and ultimate battle power "But even you have to realise living next-door with a Bijuu might make people uncomfortable. Not everyone out there lives on peace instead of oxygen."

Hashirama sighed, watching his friend from the other end of the small side table. With his hair clinging to his face and shoulders, clad in a simple Yukata for sleeping (he had no intention to go back to the house Hashirama had recently rebuilt and interrupt whatever their little brothers were up to again; these two together were the plaque) and barefooted, Madara seemed nearly… fragile. Of course, there had never been even an ounce of fat on his body, however; even though his health had much improved, Madara didn't gain even close the muscle-mass adorning the Senju's war-shaped body, nor had he reached the weight Hashirama would wish. Even though Madara had always been less of a bulky fighter aimed for pure strength and more of a slender, agile one, Hashirama's medical side couldn't ignore the fact he was still missing a few pounds of mass.

"What are you staring at, weirdo", the Uchiha snapped half-heartedly, taking the last bite of his dessert and pondering about whether getting another one was worth the walk to the kitchen.

"You're still underweight", Hashirama hummed, carefully watching the Uchiha's reaction. However, instead of getting angry, he merely shrugged. "Not much I can do about that", he noted. "I can't remember ever feeling better. My lungs are fine, my eyes are fully functioning -way above that, actually. I doubt there'll be any further improvement." He chuckled slightly and Hashirama enjoyed the rare sound. "Not even a year ago, I was pretty much one step away from death. Things have been improving, wouldn't you agree?"

Hashirama smiled once more, watching his friend. For some reason he was in great mood after meeting the Two-Tails -and Hashirama's clumsy attempts at explanation towards Ichigo-san afterwards. Finally having decided another dango wasn't worth walking five steps, Madara reached out for a mochi instead, long fingers picking out the largest one.

“How about some sparring tomorrow afternoon”, Madara suggested comfortably. “It’s been a while.” He was right, Hashirama noticed. The last time they‘d sparred had been before the Nine-Tails attacked their village… and aside from each other, there was no shinobi they could meet heads-on in either, battle or training.

“Let me check you up, first”, Hashirama asked, emptying his cup. Madara, well aware the Senju wouldn’t give up on that, popped the last piece of mochi in his mouth, before leaning back and closing his eyes. Hashirama got up, lowering one hand on Madara’s chest. He still hadn’t found a way to stop the attaching mucus, however; by now he was fairly certain it was rooted in the erroneous regulation within the intercellular liquid exchange he had noted. But there was no way he would risk worsening Madara’s condition while attempting to fix it; until he had fully understood the ailment and worked out a way to fully treat its cause, nullifying the damage done by it had to be good enough.

Madara’ chest heaved in a dry cough and he lowered his other palm soothingly onto the tender skin to ease the reflex. Within a moment, the Uchiha relaxed again, eyes closed, and Hashirama once more felt the amazement upon this ultimate trust wash over him. There was nothing keeping him from slitting his throat, breaking his neck or suffocate him -just to name three out of the insane amount of possibilities to end a life. All there was between Madara and his death was his unwavering trust in Hashirama.

While his medical chakra seeped into Madara’s chest, the Uchiha slouched a little farther in his chair. Strands of wet black hair brushed against his arm, the wetness highlighting the tint of midnight blue. His lashes cast long shadows on his pale skin and-

With a bone-shattering crash, Hashirama slammed into the last house of the street. At least he hadn’t damaged any other homes, he dimly noted. Well, aside from his own, that is. His shoulder was a little dislocated, too.

Slowly, he got up, making his way out of the ruined walls back to the street. Absently, he set his arm back into position. He’d have to apologise to Hitami, she lived here, after all… at least she wasn’t at home right now.

“Hashirama.” Ah. Hibiko. The old woman was standing at the middle of the street he had just forcefully crossed, next to her Makoto and Akiyama who both looked rather unimpressed by what they had just witnessed. “Good evening, Hibiko-san.”

“Would you care to explain why you just nearly teared down Hitami’s home after flying across the street?”

Oh. Yes. He blinked.

“I kissed Madara.”

Chapter End Notes

Smoochy Smoochy

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In which Hahirama just doesn't get it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You fucking son of a crack-snorting whore!"

"Madara, I-"

"Braindead, cock-eating treefucker!"

"Ma-"

"Useless shitpiece of backwards-evolution!"

While Hashirama automatically took a step back, he couldn't help but be impressed by Madara's verbal creativity.

The Uchiha had just gotten out of his house (exiting through the hole Hashirama had pound into the wall), stalking straight at his Hokage, without apparently noticing the elders in front of him. Cheeks flushed, clad in a simple black yukata underlining his pale skin illuminated by moonlight, contrasting the rosy hint on his face, onyx eyes blasting… Hashirama blinked, mouth opening halfway. "You're beautiful."

The raven stilled, his whole body going rigid, making Hashirama open his mouth once more, attempting to calm his best friend; he just needed a moment to- Out of thin air, a giant arm manifested in front of him, as the Uchiha leader's Susano'o backhanded him, hurtling him all the way across their village, before he smashed into the mountain their people had already started craving his face into.

With its Master making his way across the village, right at the Hokage, Madara's partway formed battle construct dissolved. "I'm going to rip your fucking cock right off and shove it up your ass, you motherfucking-"

Quickly, Nanami covered her daughter's ears, as her clanhead made his way across the rooftops above them. That wasn't something a six-year old's ears should hear, she thought, watching as her clanhead continued his path over the rooftops of their village. The two of them had always had a strangely intimidate relationship, ever since Konoha had been created… and it had just gotten more intense over time. She watched Hashirama making his way out of the crater he had craved into the mountain with his impact and frowned. She

probably was mistaken, it was highly improbable that- “They’re all blind around us, each and every one. Most of all that tree-skulled clanhead of yours!” Makoto’s voice cut her pondering and she noticed three of the elders making their way down the street. Hibiko just barked a laugh. “At least he finally had the guts to do something.” “That poor fucker doesn’t even know why he’s done it. Serves him right, getting his ass handed to him.”

Akiyama sighed. “Sometimes, I really wish I’d finally drop dead. This is humiliating.”

“None of us gets to chick out before this stupid affair’s over.”

“Guess you’ll have to complain about backaches for fifty more years”, Makoto cackled, making Hibiko bark out another laugh, as they walked past the corner. “Kami, have mercy on all of us.”

Meanwhile, Madara landed at the mountain’s top, the impact sending a cloud of dust bursting aside. “I’m going to fucking kill you”, the Uchiha snarled, eyes narrowing at Hashirama, who had by now dragged himself out of the mountain and was standing in front of him.

“I didn’t mean to”, the Senju leader cried, making his best friend…ish person snarl once more, leaping at him and making Hashirama dodge a punch that was meant to break at least one or two ribs. “I’m sorry!”

“Then why the fuck have you done it?!”, Madara would make him sorry! How *dare* he… How dare he just… Humiliate him like that, when Madara trusted him to take care of whatever fucked up ways his body had been acting up again… and Hashirama had just- How dare he! He could still feel it; soft, warm lips on his own, ever so careful as if attempting to kiss a butterfly instead of a war-forged shinobi. As if he were some fragile thing, most precious, only to be handled with uttermost care.

How humiliating for the leader of the most powerful shinobi-clan (along with the Senju, that is) to be handled like some sort of disgustingly weak insect! And then, Hashirama had even dared to… to call him…

He jumped at Hashirama once more, making him dodge again, but this time, the Uchiha didn’t cease but went after his Hokage, making him retreat a little further into the forest on top of the cliff. Madara’s kick felled an oak. “Let’s see if you still think I’m beautiful when I’m done gutting you!”

“I’ll always think you are”, Hashirama answered earnestly, making Madara stumble into a halt in front of him, even though this time, the Senju wouldn’t have dodged his blow. “I just… I never realised, you know? Back then, when I… when you… I just felt like I’d never truly *seen* you before.” By now, attempting to explain whatever it was he was referring to, Hashirama seemed at a loss of words. “I just… I always though you were beautiful, even when we were kids. But it feels like I didn’t realise it all the time, you know? And now I can’t unsee any of it, even if I wanted to!”

He swallowed, not certain whether to continue but found he couldn't stop himself, now, that the words were finally coming as if something had snapped into a place that had always been there, just… out of reach, somehow. (And people claimed he was the one who was good with feelings) "Did you know your skin is a perfect shade of ivory? You don't tan, even in summer, utterly perfectly contrasting your hair -except when the sun makes it shine like the midnight sky. I've always seen that, but never truly. And today, when I realised, I just couldn't…" The Uchiha couldn't meet Hashirama's eyes searching his own. "I'm sorry, I… I'm sorry I kissed you, but not because I did, but because of how I did it. I shouldn't…" This time, he waited until Madara was finally willing to meet his gaze, "I shouldn't have done it the way I did. I'm sorry", he breathed once more, uncertain whether his best friend's rage would be soothed with that.

"Don't you ever dare calling me that again", Madara finally answered, looking aside, refusing to meet Hashirama's eyes once more, as he grit his teeth. "I won't let anyone disregard me as a warrior, simply because you refuse to acknowledge me as such due to your fucked up concept of whatever the hell you think there is about my face."

The Senju blinked, surprised at the raven's notion. It was eerily similar to his father's believes of beauty, a view he had never truly understood due to its utter ridiculousness. "I will never see anything less in you than the only shinobi I am able to fight on eyelevel with", he answered, earnestly, attempting to catch the raven's gaze again. "You're the perfect match, you always have been." The only one who would ever be.

Seemingly without his doing, his hands started to move, attentively clasping his palms around Madara's face, calloused fingers stoking soft, pale skin, thumps caressing the fragile bone beneath. So soft, nearly devastingly beautiful compared to his own, tanned face. (Did he say that out loud?) "I would never dar-*rgh!*" For the third time today, Hashirama was sent crashing into his surroundings; this time a bunch of trees he uprooted, bursting some of them, before coming to a halt. Ah, he should really learn to supress that burning desire to touch Madara, to feel his cool skin underneath his own (if anyone ever wanted to scar that perfect, beautiful face again, Hashirama would personally rip off their hands). He dragged himself out of the mess of wood and leaves, getting up again to face Madara who was standing a few meters away, hands curled into fists. "Beauty is for the weak", he spat, sounding nearly disgusted, however, was still unable to meet the Senju's eyes. "Don't you ever call me weak again, Hashirama."

With that, the Uchiha jolted off, leaving nothing but a cloud of dust. Hashirama let himself slump, the back of his head falling on soft leaves, and groaned. Somehow, this really didn't end the way he imagined, even though he had absolutely no idea it had been supposed to work in the first place.

(Well, yeah… actually, the chapter was supposed to end here because I'm having a thing for cliff-hangers. At least, if I'm the one who gets to be mean by writing them. But it just happened to be way too short, so here we go.)

“Alright.” Izuna put away his chopsticks, leaning back in his chair. They just had lunch, large beef bowls chilli-style, the way they both (and the majority of their clan) enjoyed them most - well, if Izuna had been able to enjoy his, that is. Madara had been in a terrible mood constantly, ever since he had been coming home yesterday. “Spill the beans.”

“What are you talking about?” His older brother crossed his arms, staring at him, however; all it accomplished was an eye-roll. “You came home yesterday, basically threw poor Tobirama out, smashed the bathroom-mirror -Do you have any idea how I’m supposed to get my hair done from now on; that was our only one- and went to bed. I can’t even remember the last time you’ve been so pissed off.”

“I’ll help you with your hair, if that’s bothering you.”

Izuna stared at him, uncertain about how to answer Madara’s stupid brainchild. “You can’t even get your own into a ponytail and the only reason you let it grow back then was to piss off our father. No offense, Aniki, but I’d rather have a bathroom-mirror.” He had no idea what was up with his older brother, but a certain one about who was responsible. Because Madara’s moods tended to be related to- A quiet knock, nearly hesitating, interrupted his train of thoughts and he got up, since Madara hadn’t finished lunch yet.

“Speaking about the devil.”

Hashirama blinked, a little dumbly maybe. “I’m sorry?”

The younger Uchiha didn’t bother with an adequate answer, instead simply stepping aside, letting his Hokage enter. At least, Madara had managed to eat most of his lunch by now.

For a few seconds, it seemed the Senju would retreat, however; he entered and awkwardly knocked at the open kitchen-door, making Madara look up. The Uchiha’s eyes narrowed. “What the fuck do you want here?”

Hashirama slumped inwardly. Still mad, it seemed. If only he knew what he had done wrong to make his closest friend that angry. He had been pondering all night, even considered asking Tobirama. However, when his younger brother did come home, he all but grumbled about ‘whatever had gotten into that Uchiha’ and Hashirama decided that probably wasn’t a good time to ask for advice. Thus, he had brushed his teeth and just went to bed, wishing for some reason he wouldn’t have to go alone (how old was he? Two, still asking for his mother to tell him goodnight?).

“We agreed to train today”, he reminded Madara, a slight ray of hope carrying in his voice.

The Uchiha leader’s eyes narrowed even further and Hashirama could nearly feel his sleeves burning. A few moments passed in awkward silence, before Madara finally got up. “Let’s go.”

Hashirama sighed in relief. “Training Ground Four?”, he offered. Four had been the latest addition they’d made, a large, barren field a few minutes away from their village. It hadn’t even been their idea, but a few shinobi had created it, in order for the ‘strongest shinobi of the village’ to be able to let go at least a little without worrying about damaging property.

However; even though the training field was common ground, nobody but their Hokage and his eternal rival/friend/enemy…person would even think about visiting there. Maybe Izuna and Tobirama as well, but that was cutting it, basically.

Madara nodded. They could at least let loose a little there, he noted, as he made his way to the door. “I’ll be back for the meeting after dinner”, he informed Izuna, who nodded without looking up from the scrolls he was reading in order to avoid doing the dishes. (There was a jutsu for basically everything except maybe summoning the dead, but none to clean some bowls. Something was going wrong, obviously).

All the way to the training ground, Hashirama chattered about rumours of other shinobi-villages forming. Madara didn’t care too much about the whole drama; with the Senju and Uchiha (and by now the Yamanaka, as well as the Shimura within a few weeks and the Nara not too far behind) there was hardly an alliance able to hold a candle against them.

“If you dare not giving me your best, I will burn your house down”, he stated once they made it to the training field, making Hashirama blink. “If I don’t go all in, you’ll beat me within minutes”, he answered, confusion unfolding on his face. He would never even dream of not giving it all once he was up against Madara. Why did he feel the need to ask, it was just- He leaped aside and within the blink of an eye, Madara’s scythe sliced the ground he had just been standing on. A short laugh escaped him, as he flicked his weapon scroll (a smaller version of his battle-scroll, merely containing a bunch of his favourite weapons instead of the whole enormous collection), summoning one of his favourite broad-swords. Grinning, he took a stance, as Madara leaped at him once more, hair glowing in the sun like silken onyx.

Hashirama’s sword caught the tip of Madara’s scythe, making the Uchiha whirl around to free his weapon, using the very same motion to get behind Hashirama’s back.

The Senju beamed as he leaped aside, dodging the blow, before bringing some space between them. Every single beat of his heart he felt tenfold, Madara’s hair brushing against his forearm had his skin tingle. There was no place on earth he’d rather be than here and he could see Madara’s lips curling upwards, forming the beginnings of an unbidden smile.

Again, the two clanleaders went at each other, exchanging blows that would knock others of their clan clean off their feet.

None of them knew how long they were at it already -maybe ten minutes, maybe two hours, who cared- when Madara’s scythe got caught once more by Hashirama’s blade, whose owner used his advantage to yank the weapon out of the raven’s hand by whirling around and casting his own weapon aside in a powerful blow.

The chain still clinging to the Gunbai Madara had at his side yanked the Uchiha aside and as his opponent accurately kicked him off his already unsteady footing, he finally crashed to the ground, the impact forcing a dry cough out of his lungs. Hashirama flinched, however; forced himself to continue his assault. If he stopped now, he was very aware Madara wouldn’t forgive him easily for interrupting their spar.

He leaped at the Uchiha, who managed to dodge just in time, rolling aside, already on his feet again- just to be yanked down once more by a number of roots wrapping around his ankles. Hashirama unleashed a small chain to take hold of his wrist -the one he was holding his Gunbai with-, pulling sharply to down its prey once more. Madara's eyes met his as he fell and for a moment, something gleamed within them, captivating him, taking his breath away in a way that had nothing to do with him already breathing hard after their sparring. A single moment dragging way too long.

Finally, Hashirama released the roots holding his friend's feet onto place, however; the command was too late, ever so slightly. Madara fell aside, feet still fixed tightly to the ground, unable to follow the motion of his body, and he even heard the snap as his ankles splintered, unable to bend any further under the strain. Madara breathed in sharply, eyes widening for a splitsecond, right before the pain erupted.

Of course, he had been hurt before, was no stranger to pain, however; seeing the white end of a bone sticking out of his bleeding flesh certainly didn't make this a pleasant experience.

It didn't even take the blink of an eye, before Hashirama forced the roots to retreat back to earth, appearing right beside the Uchiha leader. "I'm sorry", he breathed, already reaching for his best friend, whose face by now didn't hide the pain he was in -there was no reason to supress the grimace forming on his face; this wasn't war, after all.

Hashirama grit his teeth. This hadn't been planned, they had agreed on tai-jutsu, after all - even though both of them didn't take that too closely, there was no spar without at least some flames and curling wood. But… Hashirama had just intended to keep his friend in check, in order to win this spar. This wasn't battle, Madara hadn't been prepared for an actual assault to damage his health, just as Hashirama wouldn't even dream of considering the Uchiha to go at his life as they had been forced to during their battles not even a year ago.

He cut off the nerve-strings, interrupting the pain signals as he went down on his knees next to Madara, who was still laying on the ground, feet twisted unnaturally as both of his ankles were broken, the left one a compound fracture. "I'm sorry", he breathed once more, carefully setting the broken bone in the inner fracture. How did he screw up this badly? While he wasn't the only medical shinobi in their village, he was very aware none of the others even came close to his capabilities… and he was fairly certain none of them would be able to fully regenerate the left ankle, as the bones had splintered in three places during the strain in a complicated pattern. If things were different, if he wasn't a medical genius (and he wasn't boasting, merely stating a fact everyone was aware about) Madara wouldn't have been able to walk again without a limp.

Once Hashirama silenced his screaming nerve-endings, Madara briefly closed his eyes in relief, a notion Hashirama didn't miss.

"I need to set the fragments", he whispered, not meeting Madara's eyes as the Uchiha nodded. Carefully, he cut off the training bandages, gaining access to the torn flesh. How did he let this happen? He should've stopped! The moment Madara had coughed, he had been distracted, focussed on ending their spar in order to look after him. His head drooped a little, without him taking his eyes off the Uchiha's wound that by now was slowly closing up. The road to hell was plastered with good intentions, or something among those lines.

“Hey.” Hashirama looked up, meeting the raven’s gaze. “Stop it.”

The Hokage blinked. “But there’s still a fracture left”, he protested. “I’m not done re-growing the-” Madara rolled his eyes, interrupting his best friend. “Not that, you moron. Stop battering yourself about this. I’ll be fine. I should’ve been more attentive.” He even chuckled a little and Hashirama’s heart peaked up at the sound. “After all, I even told you to give me your best.”

‘Giving ones best’ in a spar and basically going for the kill didn’t really have much in common, however; Hashirama didn’t press the matter. Discussing such things with Madara never truly worked out for him.

Instead, he carefully brushed his thump across the slender foot in his lap, attentively healing a small scratch Madara probably hadn’t even noticed. The bandages that had been around his shins were ruined, no use in attempting to wrap them again. Instead, he stuffed them in one of his pockets, before getting up, offering Madara a hand. For a moment, the Uchiha stared at his outstretched palm, a number of emotions mirroring in his onxy eyes, too quickly even for Hashirama to catch them. Then, he took the offer, Hashirama’s warm skin pleasant on his own. He knew Hashirama would beat himself up about this accident for the next few days, no use in adding gas to the flame. It was, what it was: An accident. Accidents happened, such was life.

“Let’s go home”, he offered, making Hashirama smile quietly. ‘Home’ had become a very different place for all of them during the last few months, no longer a place of tents, harshness and the constant need to watch your back. Without thinking, he gently squeezed the slightly smaller palm within his own. Home sounded wonderful.

Chapter End Notes

A lot of shit happened irl... sorry I'm taking so long. Doing my best tho! Cheers for my self-pitying ass, please.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

About which the author isn't certain if it's a filler or not, but she did her best.

Chapter Notes

Since lovely Staraxia pointed something out in a comment, I though I'd put it in a note, since I imagine some of you might be thinking the same:

When Madara and Hashirama spared in the last chapter, they agreed on tai-jutsu only. However, worrying about Madara's health, Hashirama wanted to end their spar quickly, and due to using his Mokuton to keep Madara in place, ended up using nin-jutsu. And while indeed Madara would certainly be able to counter that in a true fight, he didn't use his own nin-jutsu in this spar because they'd agreed not to. So well… basically the whole accident happened, because Madara didn't cheat back on Hashirama because he was too proud to do so. At least, that's what I had in mind *laughs*

"This really isn't the best of timing."

Madara huffed without pausing his pace. "Don't you dare whining now. The Shimura joined not even a week ago; you could've postponed this."

Hashirama sighed. "I know, I know."

During their last conference, they had agreed to meet again a soon as Konohagakure's leader was named and three days ago, the Daimyo had sent a letter, congratulating Hashirama for being elected as Hokage and asking for another meeting -one Hashirama would be actually able to negotiate in the name of their village. He was glad Madara had agreed to accompany him, even though that had been inevitable due to the Uchiha's status as his only advisor. It wasn't as if both of them didn't already have enough work piled up their asses, in fact, the mountain of paper they had to deal with seemed to grow every day. Without Tobirama and Izuna, they probably wouldn't even have time to get some sleep in between. By now, Izuna was basically the one who ran the clan; Madara didn't even have time to do anything other than signing the documents his younger brother had worked out for him and he knew Hashirama wasn't off much better. More often than not, the four of them sat together in the Hokage's office, brooding, discussing and planning. The children who'd enter the Academy were already chosen, however; there was still so much to decide. The timetable would have to be tough enough for them to truly learn the arts of jutsu, however they still needed enough

time off, to simply be children. The exams shouldn't be too hard or easy. And what about the older children who already had to fight before they both took over their clans' leadership? And these questions merely concerned the Academy, not even bothering with the rest of Konoha's administration…

"Hey." Madara raised his gaze, meeting Hashirama's deep umber eyes. "We'll make it work. Not all at once, but one after the other." The Uchiha couldn't supress a chuckle. Sometimes, it seemed Hashirama was able to see right through him, reading his mind like an open book and he wasn't certain how to feel about that. Instead, he settled on stating: "We should rest soon."

They hadn't been able to leave the village before early afternoon, making it impossible to cross Fire-Country until nightfall. And while both of them weren't strangers to skipping a night's sleep, they wouldn't want to participate in tomorrow's negotiations under such circumstances.

Madara chose to wait until they were deep within another forest, before casting out his senses. "Not a single chakra-source." Of course, supressed chakra would go under the radar, however; he was effortlessly able to scan a radius of a dozen miles around them. Hashirama nodded, before forming the seal of snake, using nearly undetectable miniature amounts of chakra to form the trees and branches around them into a small hut, just enough space for the two of them to rest for a few hours.

"Still nothing", Madara updated after checking once more, making Hashirama nod. If anyone neared the place, his Mokuton would warn him. The Uchiha sat down next to him, leaning his Gunbai at the wooden wall where he could grab it immediately, if need arose. Then, he wrapped himself more tightly in his mantle. The night was cooler than expected but neither wanted to catch unwanted attention with the smoke of a fire or the stirring of chakra. The only food they had brought with them were some onigiri Izuna had made out of the breakfast leftovers.

Madara's frame shivered once more as Hashirama set down, too, and after a moment he patted the place next to him. "Come here."

The Uchiha's black eyes narrowed. "If you get any stupid ideas, I'll kick you out."

Hashirama laughed, maybe a little sheepishly, however, before he could come up with an answer, the raven drew closer until he could feel Hashirama's warmth radiating on his side. He had only gotten around three hours of sleep last night and the day before, it hadn't been much better. Now that they finally rested, he could feel the exhaustion creeping into his bones and the reassuring warmth next to him was fighting off the night's chill.

Feeling Madara's weight against him was comforting in a way Hashirama hadn't anticipated. He had to be truly tired, to fall asleep within minutes, heavily leaning against his side. Rays of moonlight caught in his hair, making it gleam midnight blue, illumination his pale face in a nearly ethereal way. His head tilted slightly, cheek resting on Hashirama's shoulder.

Ever so cautious, he lifted his hand, caressing Madara's cheek with his index finger, fairly certain this counted as one of the stupid ideas but unable to help himself. The raven would

always be beautiful, no matter how much he hated it.

Hashirama could very well remember one of his father's earliest lessons. *If you ever don't know whom to fight in battle, go for the pretty ones*, he'd told him, all those years ago, when even he had been too small to fight proper opponents. *Whenever you face an enemy, remember: The more scars they bear, the uglier they are, the more fights they have survived. Survival makes shinobi strong. The pretty ones, with their perfect hair and unmaimed faces are those who have no experience. They haven't fought a proper battle yet, they are weak, hiding behind their clan. If you want to survive, go for the pretty ones. Those are the weakest.*

Hashirama couldn't supress a mirthless smile. How ironic that the prettiest one, the most beautiful, was the strongest he had ever met. Already at a young age, he had come to doubt that questionable wisdom of his father. However; associating ugliness with battle power -and in return, beauty with weakness- was a prejudice having lasted countless generations.

Absently, he noted his fingers had acted on their own once more, caressing Madara's face, his thump stroking over the Uchiha's pale lower-lip ever so softly. Obviously, the Senju clan hadn't been the only one spreading such nonsense, he thought, gaze gently tracing his companion's frail features. Not a single scar on his face and- Abruptly, he stopped himself, forcing his body to straighten again. Madara wouldn't forgive another kiss that easily… no matter how much he craved it.

Sighing, he raised his head. It was a wonder his raven slept through all this; shinobi were trained to waken at the slightest disturbance. However; Madara was quite used to his presence in his sleep by now, maybe his subconsciousness didn't notice him as a threat anymore. (He should really figure out where this intense crave to touch hailed from, it was getting rather unhealthy at this point.)

When Madara woke for the first time, sleep was still heavy on him, pulling full consciousness way out of reach. He was warm though and breathed out in relief before snuggling deeper into the source of warmth and comfort.

The second time, he was instantly wide awake. It felt like he had been asleep way longer than he should and- "I didn't do nothing!"

His eyes narrowed and he slowly got up from where he had been tucked at Hashirama's chest, his head rested in the nook between his shoulder and chest. However, the light flooding the place made him refrain from unleashing his temper, settling for "How late is it?" instead.

"Sunrise was around three hours ago", Hashirama supplied, making the Uchiha stare at him for a moment, before regaining his wits. "Why didn't you wake me, shithead?! We'll be too late!" Out of all the things Hashirama could've fucked up, this one was one of the worst! Without even bothering to try taming his hair, he grabbed his Gunbai. "Get the fuck up! We need to get going!"

Hashirama sighed. Not even an hour ago, he had been woken by Madara snuggling even deeper to him, after he had steadily crawled closer during the night. At one point, Hashirama

had woken up with the Uchiha basically in his lap, probably searching for warmth. Still half asleep himself, he had wrapped an arm around his slender waist, pulling him even closer, before letting sleep overcome him once more.

He had considered waking Madara, however; both of them hadn't gotten enough rest the last days and while he was able to adapt, Madara's body needed the extra sleep to prevent relapse in his health. Thus, he had been quiet, carefully observing the Uchiha's slow, deep breaths and closing his eyes ever once in a while to fully enjoy the sensation of the smaller body pressed against his.

Unfortunately, Madara didn't share the sentiment.

"Get up, Senju", he barked. "Fucking shit, I can't believe you!"

"My Lord, they appear to be late."

The Daimyo merely nodded. Their meeting had been scheduled at noon, however; him, his advisors Daisuke and Hikuto, as well as his four most capable guards already waited for a while even though- the door opened without warning, revealing Senju Hashirama, the recently elected Hokage of the shinobi village. "Sorry for being late, we had to face some difficulties during our trip."

His umber hair was slightly tousled but he took his seat without hesitating, smiling at the three people in front of him. Behind him, another shinobi had entered, long raven hair covering most of his pale face, one eye hidden behind it. He was slightly slimmer than the Senju, his figure less muscular and bulky. In comparison he seemed nearly… fair, in lack of a better description, Daisuke thought. In fact, the man who had to be Uchiha Madara was eerily handsome for a shinobi, especially one spreading such fear amongst his enemies. None of them had seen him in person so far, since the Senju were the ones their Daimyo had usually contracted with, forcing their rivals to ally with the Uchiha.

Uchiha Madara's single visible eye sharply scanned the room, before he took the seat to Hashirama's left. Shielding his weaker side, Daisuke noted dimly; Hashirama was right-handed.

"I am sorry to hear about your inconvenience", Hikuto finally spoke up. "Let us get started to not waste time, then." He took out a small scroll, setting it on the table. "We are happy to hear about your village expanding, Hokage-san. However, at this rate our Daimyo might become targeted by our enemies, since the Senju no longer are our allies."

"The Senju are still loyal to their Daimyo", Hashirama argued. "However, by now it is not just us but four clans willing to fight for Fire-Country, if necessary."

Hikuto nodded, noting something his scroll. "We are glad to hear that. However; with the village expanding at this rate, you certainly are able to dispense some of your shinobi in order to protect your Daimyo, in case our enemies attempt to hire other clans for his assassination, with so much physical distance between him and his protectors."

The Senju frowned. “I cannot simply forgo the number of shinobi it would take to guard him day and night. Especially not at times like this, Hikuto-san. We are still unstable and there’s a lot of matter currently up for discussion. Besides, the time ahead of us is essential for all clans to get accustomed to this new way of life.”

The Daimyo’s first advisor obviously didn’t agree. “Do not forget whom this village is credited to, Hashirama-san. If you cannot return any of your Daimyo’s kindness, I am not certain you will receive much of his anymore.”

“If the Daimyo is so very upset by the possibility of assassination, he may move to Konoha.” Daisuke nearly shivered upon the Uchiha’s voice raising for the first time since entering, sharp enough to slice flesh yet still chillingly cool. “The Uchiha have had deep rooted connections to the three wealthiest families in Fire-Country since over a century. While contracting with its Daimyo is our preferred way of survival, it is not the only one. We do not rely on any of you, so drop this child’s play of attempted blackmail.”

Madara’s words had come sharp and precise, like a snake striking to kill its prey. The silence after was thick enough to cut until the Daimyo himself spoke up: “If that is true, I fear your union with the Uchiha is doomed to fail”, he told Hashirama, who frowned. “If the Uchiha choose another path for the village’s future, the Senju will follow”, he simply declared, eyes meeting Madara’s for a single moment dragging too long. Just as he knew the Uchiha would follow the Senjus’ lead if it were the other way around. None of them would simply turn their backs anymore. If Madara decided negotiations with the Daimyo were fruitless, he would respect that decision and follow the Uchiha’s plans.

“The moment you fully unsheathe your weapons, I will kill you.”

Again, it was the Uchiha leader’s voice that cut through them, making Daisuke notice the guards had halfway drawn their katana due the last parts of conversation, obviously preparing for escalation. One of them narrowed his eyes at Madara before drawing his katana, teeth bared in dare.

There was a flash of movement too fast for anyone of them to observe, before- Hashirama’s laugher echoed in the large room, unfitting for the strained atmosphere. His palm rested on the Uchiha’s shoulder and with a shudder Daisuke noticed the slim blade that had appeared out of nothing but thin air in the raven’s fingers, no doubt able to kill off its target with a single move not even taking the blink of an eye. However, the Hokage didn’t seem concerned in the slightest, still smiling widely, nearly on the verge of grinning. “You’ll have to forgive Madara, he doesn’t take well on security risks”, he laughed, eyes sparking as he watched the Uchiha with a fondness that was uncalled for and so very intimate it made Daisuke wish to avert his gaze.

He watched the weapon disappear within the split of a second -he didn’t even know where he had put it on his person- as the Uchiha’s body relaxed slightly under Hashirama’s touch. Daisuke felt his mouth falling open, forcing it shut, but still not able to stop starring. If anyone on this godforsaken world was able to control that Uchiha, it was Senju Hashirama… and he felt all of them should take care in remembering that.

“Now, then.” The Hokage smiled as if nothing had happened these last minutes, folding his hands on the table. “Let us start over, shall we?”

“I heard he’s a dark man and his aura’s burning hot”, one of her maidens whispered.

“I heard he’s beautiful, but he kills everyone in his way… are you certain about this, Hime-sama?”, the other one asked.

The Daimyo’s daughter nodded. While she had seen Hashirama-sama, the leader of the Senju clan, twice already -even though only out of the distance- none of them had ever seen Uchiha Madara in person. There were rumours, however; most of them didn’t even fit with each other. One told about him being a demon, having no mercy on the battlefield and off, another one claimed he was beautiful in a way most woman could only dream of, a third whispered whoever looked at his eyes was doomed to death.

Sakuya had been curious about that man ever since she had first heard of him, when his father told his advisors to contact the Senju since one of the rivalling families had contradicted with the Uchiha -Hashirama was claimed to be the only one able to stop the Uchiha leader. And since the two clans had been at war longer than anyone could remember, seeing that man had been all but impossible.

Now, however… “Negotiations with my father lasted all day; from what I know they decided to stay the night and depart at sunrise. It’s now or never!” She couldn’t take any chances by waiting for a better time, not if there might never be one.

Gratefully, both shinobi had refused a guard in front of their rooms, making things easier now.

Just sneaking a tiny peek, it wasn’t as if they’d hurt anyone… and besides, it was the dead of night, he would be fast asleep. It wasn’t as if they were hurting anyone, after all.

Ever so careful, she opened the door, tiptoeing inside. She could already see him, he was sleeping on his bedroll at the window. All she could see of his face was a mountain of hair, though, black in the way it was common for Uchiha (or so she had heard).

Carefully, she sneaked closer, until she could see his face in the moonlight and felt her breath hitch. “He really is beautiful”, she whispered, staring at the pale face -or rather the parts of it that weren’t hidden under so much hair it made her wish hers would only be half as voluminous. She leaned forward ever so slightly, to catch a closer look, however, the rest of him was covered under two bedsheets. If only she could- “The one time I called you beautiful, you punched me straight into the mountain.”

The three woman flinched at the unfamiliar voice, whirling around even though the words had been spoken with a chuckle, entirely good-natured. She immediately recognised Senju Hashirama standing at the door (neither had heard him open it, how had he entered?) and felt her mouth opening in panic, however, was interrupted by a second voice hailing from the man who had been fast sleep not even seconds ago, however; sounded way too awake for

having just woken up. “That is because you didn’t break every bone in your miserable body, even though you deserved it.”

Graceful as a cat of prey, Madara got up from his bedroll, the sheets sliding down on him. Sakuya felt her heart beat way too fast, hastily looking back and forth between the two men, the two maidens next to her still frozen in shock.

“Next time, you better just knock”, Hashirama advised good-natured, before turning to his partner. “When you didn’t react, I got worried”, he told him, making the raven roll his eyes once. “Moron”, he answered, before turning to the three women. “If you ever consider sneaking up on someone again, just don’t”, he told them. “Consider yourself lucky you weren’t killed the moment you opened the door.”

“Sneaking up on a shinobi isn’t the best of ideas”, Hashirama agreed, before he smiled at them. “But since we’re already here, might I ask why you intended on watching my advisor in his sleep?”

By now, Sakuya hadn’t managed to get her voice back, but at least one of her maidens did. “We just… wanted to know what he looked like”, she explained, not able to meet anyone’s eyes. “All these rumours and Sakuya-sama just wanted to… to…” At a loss of words, she broke off.

Hashirama smiled widely. “Sakuya?”, he asked. “The Daimyo’s only daughter, isn’t it? It’s a pleasure meeting you.” At the other side of the room, Madara made a sound clearly indicating he thought differently. “Since we are heading home tomorrow morning, this isn’t a good time for talk. However, how about I officially invite the three of you to the village? You ma*mph!*” The rest was cut off when a single pillow collided with the Hokage’s face.

“You can write that letter right now if you want to but get the fuck out of my room!”

Hashirama couldn’t supress a fond smile. Madara was in a mood again, but he always was if he was woken up without proper reason -or rather, what he considered such. The Uchiha’s hair was a mess and he felt his fingers tingle with the desire to smooth them out of his face. He opened the door for their visitors, before exiting himself. “I will try to write the letter as soon as I find the time”, he promised. “However; for now I’ll get back to bed to sleep some more, and so should you.”

Tomorrow would be another busy day, after all.

(And sometimes, even that was an understatement.)

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

A shitload of tails, duh.

Chapter Notes

Welp, this took a month to write...
And I hate it. I'm not certain why -probably because it's all talk somehow- but I really dislike this chapter. I'll try to write some pleasant stuff in the next one. I've planned so much and probably will scratch half of it because it just doesn't fit.
Anyway. Lovely Staraxia wanted to thank me for mentioning her in one of my notes in an earlier chapter and she decided to gift me a fic! I'm so excited and happy, no one's ever done something like that for me! It's called All the Rays of Sun in case anyone wants to give it a shot. (Please do!)

No responsibility for any occuring mistakes. It's after 1am but I REALLY wanted to post this for you before tomorrow. I'll probably be ashamed as soon as I re-read.

“All in all, it went rather well, didn’t it?”

“The bastards tried to blackmail you.”

“But in the end, they didn’t.”

“That’s because I would’ve slaughtered them, if they’d tried again.”

“And that’s why I need you at my side”, Hashirama laughed, nearly making Madara miss a step that would have had him stumble right into a tree.

“You really need to work on your phrasing”, he muttered, making his best friend laugh once more. He had a beautiful laugh, the kind that warmed your heart just by hearing it. Even more precious in world like theirs; it was in desperate need of some warmth, after all.

They had departed just a little after sunrise and would hopefully be back in Konohagakure at early evening. After the disastrous start of their meeting, they had indeed managed to accomplish more than Madara had anticipated. Unfortunately, most of it would lead to even more paperwork in the future.

“The things we do for peace”, he chuckled, making Hashirama smile. At times like this, it nearly seemed too easy. Whatever the future held up for them, he was up to it… as long as Madara was at his side.

And then there were times like those a few hours later at early afternoon, when Madara stated out of nothing but thin air: “There are four Bijuu at the outsides of Konoha” and all he could do was blink dumbly, asking “What?”

The raven huffed. “Have you gone deaf, Senju?”, he asked dryly, before repeating: “Four Tailed Beasts are currently right outside of Konoha, another one is approaching from south-west. Kurama and Nibi aren’t amongst them.” If he had been paying closer attention, he would have noted the masses of chakra long since, however was only kneading chakra once in a while during their travel in order to avoid unwanted attention. “It seems they heard of a certain someone’s invitation”, he mocked sharply, making the Hokage’s head droop. “I didn’t mean it like that”, he attempted to defeat himself, however, all he achieved was Madara laughing at him.

It was a beautiful laugh, Hashirama noted, listening with a strange feeling of… warmth… in his chest. Deep and genuine, just a side melodic and the slightest bit mockingly -which Hashirama found he enjoyed most, because he had always been the only once who received this good-natured mocking laugher from his best friend.

“Let’s get going then!”

“I *will* kill him.”

“No offense, but a lot of people already tried to.”

“I’ll tear his brain right out of his ear. See if he survives that.”

Izuna wolf-whistled. “That might actually work. Or… do you think his body’ll just grow another brain?”

“He never needed it anyway”, Tobirama growled. “Wouldn’t even make a difference.”

In a flash, an Uchiha kunoichi arrived in front of them. “Itami”, Izuna greeted her, before she reported: “Two-Tails is closing in”, making Tobirama nod once. That had been expected, after all. Since yesterday, the Bijuu had started arriving at their village. Eight-Tails had been first, its giant octopus-tails swirling behind as it had barrelled straight at Konoha. Izuna and Tobirama had awaited it in front of the valley that had been created during Madara’s fight with the Kyuubi.

“Hachibi”, Tobirama had called out. “What leads you to our village?”

The Bijuu had stopped then, glancing at the two shinobi in its path. “Kurama told me I might come to face you”, it drawled then. “But I am here to meet my brothers, Indra and Ashura, whom we all thought long lost. Step aside, I have no business with you.”

Great, Izuna thought. It seemed after the Kyuubi-incident, they should adapt to regular Bijuu-visits, after all. Maybe building an entrance claiming *Dear Tailed Beast, please stop here, rebuilding the village will be a shitload of work after you stomp it to the ground.* Instead he went for "Madara and Hashirama are currently on their way to the Daimyo, negotiating future contracts. We don't expect them back until tomorrow afternoon at the earliest."

The Ox's strange round eyes narrowed. "Kurama already told me they do neither remember their names, nor any of us. It does not matter to us; they still share our chakra, they still are our brothers. I shall wait for them, then, and inform Shukaku as soon as he arrives."

"And who would Shukaku be?", Tobirama asked, carefully refraining from crossing his arms. No need to start this on bad terms. Facing Kyuubi had cost Madara his eyesight and even though he was confident he could take Hachibi on if him and Izuna teamed up, that was absolutely not the preferred outcome.

"Amongst humans, Shukaku is better known as One-Tails, I assume. I informed him before heading to this place, I think he will arrive within the next hours, as soon as he has sought out Isobu", Hachibi drawled. "We haven't spoken in so long, seeking each other out now is more difficult than it should." And why was he even telling these two about that? They could be lucky he hadn't just stomped them down, but considering what Kurama said -that Ashura had claimed they were brothers of theirs- it would be uncalled for.

"So, what you are saying is, the One-Tails is currently heading towards Konoha as well", Tobirama repeated slowly, making the Eight-Tails huff. "Are you deaf?", it demanded, one of its tails hitting the ground in irritation, causing it to tremble beneath their feet. "Afterwards, I imagine Isobu -whom you will just know as Three-Tails- will follow, after having sought out one of the others. Kurama is currently on his way north, looking for Saiken. But that's none of your business. Get lost now, I'll wait for them here."

Four hours later, One-Tails had arrived, then Six-Tails, and Izuna claimed life had turned into some badly written novella, as they had talked to Ichigo before informing their own clans.

And just like that, seven Bijuu currently lingered around their village. One after one had turned up, claiming they wanted to talk to their brothers and even though weary was the understatement of the century, the people of Konoha dealed with the giant looming shadows, the rumbles whenever one of the creatures even only moved and the knowledge that not even the clan-leaders' brothers could do anything if they decided to annihilate the village and everyone within.

"Izuna-sama." Itami's voice took him back to the present and he focussed back on the kunoichi's report. "Hokage-sama and Madara-sama are nearing the village as well."

Immediately, Tobirama cast out his senses. With these gigantic pools of unsuppressed chakra around them, searching for any other signatures was a headache -literally- which ultimately forced him alongside the village's other sensors to refrain from kneading chakra for extended periods of time. Those who were assigned to carefully kept at least a few miles between their posts and the village in order to ease the struggle at least a little.

"Let's inform Ichigo-san."

Tobirama nodded. The Yamanaka clanhead had been there during their brothers' first meeting with the Two-Tails, after all. It wouldn't do any harm to have him take part on the second one, as well.

Thus, the three of them were on their way exactly one minutes and forty seconds later.

"Let's hope Hashirama didn't sell the village's eternal service for breakfast", Tobirama huffed, making Izuna bark a laugh. "Let's hope Aniki didn't kill off the entire castle afterwards." "That would certainly be worth it", the Senju deemed, making Izuna grin. "Remember that one time we fought, and you used that jutsu to dissolve my blade into boiling water? It worked but then your scroll exploded. I totally remember you claimed it was worth it, too, but I still don't know why."

"Because the scroll was supposed to disarm you and it did", Tobirama supplied, making the Uchiha roll his eyes.

"How often did you fight?", Ichigo finally asked. He wasn't certain the questions wouldn't seem odd, however; he was truly interested. The battles between Senju and Uchiha were legendary and just as the clanheads were arch-enemies, battling each other whenever their clans crashed, such were their younger brothers. Izuna shrugged. "I never really counted, I guess-" "Thirty-seven." The Uchiha blinked. "What now?" "Thirty-seven", Tobirama repeated, not taking his eyes from the path in front of them. "Six times less than Anija and Madara fought, their count is forty-three as far as I'm aware."

Izuna rolled his eyes. "You have issues", he claimed, even though somehow, he wasn't even surprised. Ichigo was, though. A draw happened every so often, however, such a number was incredible, especially considering the opponents' battle-strength.

Tobirama refrained from answering -and rolling his eyes- as they stopped at the edge of the battlefield. Two-Tails and their brothers were just a few miles from here, closing in quickly. After a few minutes, he could already see the masses blue flames enclosing the giant cat, however; neither Hashirama nor Madara were to be seen, even though their chakra was closing in just as quickly.

Izuna blinked. "You gotta be shitting me." Ichigo and Tobirama both turned to him, noticing his Sharingan were activated, slowly rotating even though he refrained from calling his Mangekyou to life. "What happened", the Senju asked, only to be answered with a huff. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you", he muttered dryly. "Just wait, you'll see."

Two-Tails closed in further and Tobirama could finally hear his brother's laugh. "And then the rock hit me straight from above! I went down and Madara laughed at me, claiming it totally was a draw. That was the second headache."

"The first one was when you ran straight into a rock because you were busy showing me that 'Awesome Nin-Gen Transcription Water Earth Carpet jusu' that never even made sense", Madara stated dryly, making Hashirama cry out. "It totally did! You just never were open for it! I told you, if you would've even tried to-" "No." "Madara!" Kami, even all the way up Tobirama could hear his brother wine. It really was ten kinds of pathetic.

Next to them, Ichigo stilled. “Don’t tell me-” Finally, Two-Tails had reached the field and for a single moment, Tobirama didn’t know whether he wanted to laugh, cry, or rip his brother a new one. All at once, probably and he didn’t even know where to start.

All the way up, right onto the giant flaming head, his brother sat surrounded by blue fire, right next to the Bijuu’s left ear, laughing as he told some story that had to hail from the times him and Madara had met at the river all those years ago. The Uchiha sat next to him, cross-legged, his Gunbai resting in his lap. “Don’t listen to him. I tell you, Matatabi, the jutsu was awesome! He was just to prude to get it!”

“Even though I am inclined to believe you, your attempts at jutsu have always ended in disaster, Ashura. I remember one time -you were even younger than you are now- you were determined to figure out a jutsu in order to seal some kind of tree. I don’t remember much more; I was barely more than a cub at that time. However; it ended with the village covered in mud and father having to scrub the living room.”

Madara laughed loudly -something he rarely ever indulged in. “That sounds like you.” He got up, grabbing his Gunbai and gracefully leaped down from the Bijuu’s head, landing in front of Izuna and ignoring Hashirama’s protest, before the older Senju finally jumped down as well, extinguishing some fire that was still clinging to his shoulder. Tobirama felt a vain on his forehead throb. “Please don’t tell me you have ridden a Bijuu all the way back to the village.”

Hashirama blinked in surprise. “Of course not. Matatabi caught up with us halfway back.”

The Bijuu’s two-coloured eyes took in the whitehaired shinobi. “This is the one you deem your brother?”, it asked, making Hashirama laugh sheepishly. “Well, we had the same parents, I believe that’s the point.”

Before Matatabi was able to disagree -shared flesh didn’t mean anything, after all chakra was what truly counted- the ground rumbled beneath their feet, as one of the Bijuu probably got up. “Ashura? Is that you?”

And then another, female sounding voice added: “Indra… Indra is with him!”

The ground shook heavily, as seven Tailed Beasts set their gigantic mass into motion, getting up, one of them flying and whoever was inside their houses at the moment probably was afraid the walls would collapse around them.

“Please don’t stomp down the village, please don’t stomp down the village”, Izuna muttered. Since they had met with the Two-Tails and their older brothers outside the village, on the barren battlefield Madara had fought the Kyuubi on, it offered at least enough space for all of them. However, one carelessly flicked tail would be enough to tear down half of Konoha.

“It is them!”

“Kurama was right, after all.”

“He’s always been an asshole but never a liar.”

“When I heard about Senju and Uchiha making peace, my niece claimed that is was -and I quote- the most awkward thing to ever happen. I hate to break it into her, but she was wrong.”

Izuna huffed. “So, you do have a sense of humour”, he mocked the Yamanaka, making Tobirama roll his eyes. “Stop pestering Ichigo-san. We have bigger things to worry about. Literally.”

As little as Izuna wanted to admit such, Tobirama was right. While a single Bijuu at a time was a lot to deal with, seven -now eight- at once was really taking the cake. Naturally, the flying one -Seven-Tails- was the first to arrive, however; the others took merely a few moments more. Soon, they had surrounded the five humans in their midst; eight pairs of eyes glued at them, numerous tails swishing around.

Hashirama smiled, turning around once to meet each of their gazes. “Welcome, all of you”, he greeted. “I’ll be honest; Madara noticed you when we were on our way back from the Daimyo, therefore I’m afraid we haven’t prepared anything.”

“It’s true, then?”, one of them asked; it was the snail-like Beast. “That you don’t remember anything? That you don’t remember us?”

Surprisingly, it was Madara who answered. “We cannot remember anything before our actual birth, Six-Tails. I know you think we are your brothers, but I will not lie to you on a topic of such importance: We are not. I had five brothers once; I lost four of them. I feel your pain and agony, however; none of it changes that fact that I am Uchiha Madara… and even though he is now Hokage, this man will never be anyone else than Senju Hashirama.”

“You truly have forgotten, then.” Five-Tails bowed its head, watching the two of them, considering, before going on. “I am Kokuō”, it introduced itself, then. “It does not matter, whether you remember or not. We still share father’s chakra, we still are brothers. If you wish for me to retreat, I’ll leave and never bother you again in this new life. But if you don’t-” “Then I’ll rain fire and death onto that Daimyo’s land for daring to oppose you”, the Seven-Tails interrupted. “Because that is what brothers do.”

“And if you want me to, I will build a wall around your village, no one will ever be able to break”, One-Tails offered. Its voice was strangely high-pitched for a being of such incredible size, Izuna thought. Better not mention that, though, or else he might poke a sore spot. “My defence is perfect, after all!”

Hashirama smiled again. It seemed, their shared village did so much more than put two clans to peace. The Yamanaka, the Shimura, the Nara as soon as they had fully come to an agreement about their forests, the Kyuubi, and now this. He felt a wave of gratefulness wash over him, pure gratitude for this miracle that lead to all of them standing here, to him standing here next to that man he had been forced at war with.

“My father couldn’t even remember why we were at war with the Uchiha.” The words just spilled out of his mouth, forced by the intense amount of emotion suddenly building up in his chest. They had brought two war-forged clans to peace, did the unthinkable of joining people separated by oceans of blood. And now… now they stood here, at yet another battlefield,

with those beings who hated humanity just as much as they were hated themselves by whatever paces destiny had spun for them to end up here. “Neither could his father… or even his father’s father”, he continued. “Uchiha killed Senju, Senju killed Uchiha, driven by an endless circle or hate. We still don’t know where it all started but we were desperate to-” “Ashura.”

Hashirama stopped, raising his gaze to meet that of Four-Tails. The Bijuu similar to a giant ape watched him out of serious eyes. “When you killed Indra… and Indra killed you… your people started doing the same. Your children fought those of Indra, as did your grand-children… and those after, again and again and again. Saiken and I attempted to soothe at one point, to make them remember whatever was left of their bond, of all that was lost… They attempted to kill us, to use our chakra against each other. In our naiveté, we started a craving for Bijuu-chakra that only stopped when we finally killed those who wouldn’t stop persuading. In the end, our hatred for humanity grew stronger than it had ever been before, and we finally stopped caring as those we once considered family slaughtered each other.”

“At least until Kurama started running around, claiming he found you, and each and every one of us rushed here to finally meet you again, after all these millennia”, Eight-Tails supplied, scratching its head. “Even though it would certainly be way more touching if you could actually remember any of us.”

“We can’t have it all, Gyūki”, Three-Tails rumbled. “Let’s be happy with what we got. It doesn’t truly matter if they believe it all. What matters is that *we* know. And this time, we are strong enough to protect all of us. Even from each other, if we have to!”

“Don’t jinx it”, Matatabi cautioned. “Indra has already overpowered Kurama once, I’m not certain we would be able to force them apart, if-” “We will, if we have to!”, Five-Tails growled. “I will not sit back again and watch just because our brothers are stronger than us!”

Hashirama lifted his hands soothingly. “After all we have been through, I seriously doubt it’ll ever come down to that.” Not if he could help it! Not if he… He would never let that one nightmare become reality. For a moment, he could see it; Madara’s dark coat wet with blood, Hashirama’s katana in his back, as he went to his knees in front of him, cursing his -not *theirs*, his and his alone- village to an ever-lasting spiral of hatred and war. He would never... his fingers itched to move towards the Uchiha, to be covered in healing chakra, making sure he was alright, he was breathing, was right next to him were he belonged. At his side, ever since that senseless war was over… and if he was honest, even before. Ever since he had met that sultry boy at the river, showing him how to skip rocks.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

In which Hashirama gets it. A little.
Also, someone is going to get their ass kicked.

Chapter Notes

I'm back, baby.
And soon I'll be gone again.
I'm gonna start my Master-Studies in October and I'm gonna have to move to Dresden for that, basically all the way across the country. If anyone's interested, I'm gonna make my Master's degree in Research in advanced training and Organisational development ("Weiterbildungsforschung und Organsationsentwicklung").
Further news: I finally got a new notebook. The old one's hard drive is fucked and letters w, s, x and 2 just won't work properly anymore. Now I got a Gaming Laptop (even though a cheap one); finally I can start running Raids in WoW again, letting fuckers die who refuse to get out of the crossfire because they "have heal". Remember guys: Pissing off your Heal… never a good idea if you wanna live.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What are you doing?"

"Reading", the Uchiha answered, eyes still firmly on the stone tablet in front of him. The room was empty of anything but the tablet -not even a large one, approximately the size of an adult's upper body- and two fire bowls, illuminating the room in several shades of flickering flames.

"I can see that", the Senju chuckled, sitting down next to Madara, facing the tablet thatreted on a small pedestal at the wall. "I can't read anything", he confessed, making the raven refrain from rolling his eyes. "You shouldn't even be here. This temple is sacred to the Uchiha." His eyes still didn't leave the tablet, his Eternal Mangekyou Sharingan rotating as he struggled to decipher another part of the inscription. He felt Hashirama flinch next to him, as he made to get up and leave. "Ah… I'm sorry! I didn't know, I just wondered-" Yeah, he wasn't the only one, Madara thought wryly. Hashirama hadn't followed him as he had made way to the sacred temple; how had he even been able to seek him out? The whole building was underground for a reason. However, this was the thing about him… the Senju always found him. It probably didn't matter where he went, if Hashirama set his mind to it, he would find him.

“Stay.”

The word was out before he was even aware of it and Hashirama halted next to him, before carefully sitting down cross-legged. It was strangely quiet in the village, now that the Bijuu had left -all of them but Matatabi who currently resided in the forest outside the village, parts of which Hashirama personally had redesigned to her liking and comfort. The trees were taller, allowing her to move without having to tear them down, some of them even wide enough to offer shadow, others leaving open glades and a generous river that Tobirama had helped create. She was uncertain about the length of her visit, however; Hashirama attempted to make it as pleasurable as possible. None of them knew what Kurama was up to, Seiken had been up to date the most, since he had told her he was “Looking for something”, without further definition what it was he was searching.

A drip of red caught his attention, drawing him back to the present as a single drop of blood dripped from Madara’s lashes, drawing a sharp crimson line on his cheek. He felt something stir at the sight, a strange tug at his heart forcing him to ever carefully cup the Uchiha’s cheek, turning it as to have the other face him before he wiped away the trace with his thump.

“It’s not worth overextending your eyes”, he claimed, making Madara frown. “We can’t know because I haven’t deciphered the whole thing yet”, he argued, making Hashirama smile -a little mournful, maybe. “You always fail to recognize your own value”, the Senju gently scolded. Madara had always been willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good -a little too much so, if one asked Hashirama. His thumb caressed the skin beneath it, following the regal cheek-bone before gently starting to soothe the strained eye with medical chakra.

He felt Madara relax as the burning in his eyes finally faded. He had been sitting in this room ever since the morning (how late was it, anyway?) attempting to decipher the ancient text as far as possible with these new eyes. Only now as it finally faded, he fully noticed the strain in his eyes and the fatigue in his body, causing his lids to fall halfway closed. “Why do you always have to be so very stubborn, hm?”, Hashirama murmured, amazed as the Uchiha kept utterly still, cheek still gently cupped in his tanned palm, the contrast of their skin making it seemingly impossible to tear his gaze away.

“Look who’s talking”, Madara muttered back tiredly, no real bite in his voice, making Hashirama chuckle slightly as his other hand raised to tend to his right eye as to not be forced to move his fingers from Madara’s cheek.

For a single moment he could feel Madara rest his head in his palms, content to just let Hashirama deal with the outcome of his work and he felt something tighten in his chest -the very same of whatever had reacted to seeing the bloody tear drip down his face- as the proud Uchiha allowed him to witness this moment of weakness. The Sharingan faded and Madara’s eyes fell shut as he couldn’t supress a chuckle. “If my forefathers could see you here with me, they’d kill my bastard of a father to make sure I’d never been born in the first place.”

Hashirama smiled slightly. “You know I would never let them.”

Another chuckle escaped, this time more genuine, however, he didn’t get an answer. Instead, he caressed Madara’s cheekbones with his thumbs, his lashes casting shadows upon them in the flickering light.

Divine in his beauty, overwhelming like being punched straight into the guts.

“Please don’t punch me through another wall”, he breathed.

His lips found Madara’s, marvelling at the softness, the perfectness beneath them and he didn’t even care whether he would be the Uchiha’ personal punching bag for the rest of his life. All that mattered was right here, right in front of him and he felt his heart cheer with joy when Madara didn’t force him off, didn’t even raise his head out of the hands grasping him ever so gently.

He didn’t even know when his lips had started to move, not before he felt the raven complete the pattern, ever so slightly opening his mouth and for the very first time in his life Hashirama truly understood the term of breathing another in. The world narrowed to nothing but this room, this moment and when he felt Madara’s fingers tangle in his hair; he opened his mouth, bidding the other to do the same as he slipped his tongue between his lips. The kiss started to get messier, lost was the soft, timid caution and was instead replaced by another, rougher perfection.

His hands didn’t leave Madara’s face, suddenly afraid it would be over once he broke the connection. Instead he swiped his tongue across the inside of Madara’s lower lip, relishing the taste before exploring further, swallowing something that might have been a sigh, had the raven’s lips not been sealed shut by him.

When Madara finally came to his senses, he roughly pushed the Senju off of him, his once tired gaze now sharp, eyes not closed in enjoyment but rather narrowed in anger. “What the fuck?”

“Yes”, Hashirama blurted, before first realising Madara obviously had asked something different than he had thought and second that he hadn’t even considered disagreeing.

The raven’s eyes narrowed even further at him and he crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I’ll give you one chance to explain why you fucking kissed me, before I beat the everlasting crap out of you and feed your guts to my birds.”

Hashirama blinked, well aware he didn’t look too smart at the moment. “I… wanted to.”

“Stop running and get here, you fucking disgrace!”

Feeling something that might evolve into a tiny amount of panic, Hashirama decided following Madara’s order wasn’t the smartest thing to do right now.

“I’ll rip you not one new one, but a dozen! Get here, you useless excuse for a Hokage!”

“I already told you, you’d make a better one”, Hashirama yelped, dodging a bunch of kunai that instead perfectly impacted a house.

“Is there a reason Madara-sama chases our Hokage all across the village?”, a Yamanaka kunoichi asked, making the Senju next to her turn to face her. “Ah. You weren’t part of the

village yet, the last time", he remembered. "No one really knows what happens between those two. Secret lovers, secret jutsu, secret family, secret illness… trust me when I say there's nothing *not* covered by the rumours, but no one really knows." He couldn't supress a grin. "The only thing *I* know is that I wouldn't switch places for all the money in the world."

Watching Hashirama doge the Uchiha's scythe with a whelp, the kunoichi crossed her arms in front of her chest. "I thought the Hokage is the strongest shinobi in the village."

Her partner in conversation grinned. "Don't let any Uchiha hear that or you'll get a lecture about how they never really decided who truly is stronger since Madara-sama was severely ill during his defeat. And even though I'd be on Hashirama-sama's side on that matter, I'm pretty certain running isn't that bad of a plan right now."

"I just couldn't help myself!"

"Let's see how much you care about *helping* when I rip your fucking balls right off!"

Hashirama cried out in a rather un-Hokagely manner that didn't do much to his reputation as the God of Shinobi. "But I want to have children one day!"

"Be glad then, I'm going to spare the world even more of your genetic dumbness!" The next kunai was aimed right at Hashirama's crotch, making the Senju wonder if he could regrow his testicles in case they didn't survive the day. Why did he always have to make Madara mad? He knew the raven would be angry for being kissed again, but somehow his attempts at explanation made it worse each time. Maye be should just keep his mouth shut afterwards. But then, at least this time Madara had waited for him at make an explanation instead of kicking him right into the next wall, so maybe he wasn't just as mad as last time? But then, Madara at least hadn't attempted to castrate him back then.

"Aniki!" It was his brother's voice that finally got the older Uchiha to pause in his quest of nailing his best friend's balls over a mantelshelf. "What is it?"

"If you could stop trying to murder Hashirama for just today, our fucking clan-meeting is due in fifteen minutes. Fourteen, actually."

Madara frowned. No, the monthly meeting was scheduled after dinner and- he raised his gaze, noticing the sun had already started to set. He had been in the temple, deciphering the ancient stone plate all day! Right on cue, his stomach rumbled, however, he didn't have time for dinner now. Anyway; Hashirama and whatever the fuck was wrong with him would have to wait until tomorrow. He had to get home and change before heading off to the gathering hall. Even though by now, Senju and Uchiha had gotten quite accustomed to each other, problems still arose on a regular basis. No one could -or should- forget generations of bloodshed within less than a year, after all. Even though everyone tried their best, in the end, it would be the children who'd build bridges. With the recently opened academy, the teams (even though only four of them at the moment) and every-day life, the friendships they forged would truly unite the clans once they grew up. But well, for now they had to deal with their differences and work further on overcoming them.

Madara entered the hall, making pace to his seat in front of the already assembled elders, Izuna next to him. “The meeting is started”, he declared, making a kunoichi -Katori, his third-grade cousin- step forth, looking grimly at him. He was aware her anger wasn’t aimed at him, though. “Hatako left me months ago for some younger bitch and now demands to be included in all decisions considering our son after not giving a fuck for nearly half a year. I won’t let him ruin our life further!” Madara nodded. He had business to settle.

After maybe half an hour, he took the kettle standing on a small table next to him, pouring a cup of tea for himself. Since these meetings could drag on for hours, it had gotten a habit of his to always have a pot of green tea next to him.

He took a sip. Katori’s issue had been dealt with, however; three more were on his schedule and he emptied his cup as another clan-member greeted him respectfully. “Madara-sama. I am glad we are finally living in peace with the Senju, however; one of them decided to open a bakery of all things. I wouldn’t care, but whenever the wind blows from north-west, everything smells of-”

A thud interrupted him as his clanhead toppled face-first to the ground, where he stayed motionlessly.

“Aniki!” Before anyone else had even moved, Izuna was already at his brother’s side, turning him around, starling when he found his breathing to quicken until he as nearly hyperventilating, pupils blown wide. Hashirama, he had to get Hashirama here, but he couldn’t just leave his brother! Next to them, Itsuko and Sarana appeared, as the crowd began to realise what happened. “No one leaves this place”, the old man ordered, making one of their people shout: “Where’s Makoto?”

Before he was able to get an answer, Madara’s flying breath came to a sudden hold as it stopped completely. Not even a full second later, Hashirama appeared next to him in a speed that had the tea pot knocked over by the gust of wind it caused.

With a single cry of “Madara!” he went to his knees next to the Uchiha leader and his brother. Instantly, he lowered his palms onto his chest, going rigid for a single moment before gritting his teeth. His chakra rose, causing the wall behind him to splinter in his rage but he didn’t take his eyes off Madara.

He had to get his heart working again! Its last beat had been no more than fifteen seconds ago; Hashirama wouldn’t let it be the last! His palms forced medical chakra into the dying organism (not dead yet, he wouldn’t let him die, couldn’t live if he failed on this) to get the nonresponding organ working again. If he got the heart beating again, he could force oxygen into the bloodstream without needing the breathing to work again.

A wooden clone appeared from his back, carefully taking Madara out of Izuna’s arms to settle him into its own, positioning him differently in order to offer Hashirama better access to the areas he needed to work with. The clone started forcing oxygen into Madara’s bloodstream to allow Hashirama to fully work on repairing the failing organism.

“If you leave me now, I’ll tear down the gates of hell and take you back with me”, the Senju promised, eyes not leaving the frail body for even the slightest moment. “You don’t… Don’t

you dare to leave me now! I won't allow you to!"

The body had been damaged on a mitochondrial level; the cellular respiration had been completely shut down, forcing all further processes into failure due to the lack of oxygen. Madara's whole organism had failed within a matter of seconds.

The clone stopped infusing oxygen; it did more harm than good since Madara's body was unable to work with it. For a single moment Hashirama closed his eyes, forcing himself to think. Madara's mitochondria were unable to process the oxygen that was needed by them to create the primary chemicals necessary for the intracellular energy transfer the whole organism relied on. Thus, all cells would inevitably die due to the lack of energy needed for survival. Which in return only led to one conclusion is he wanted to stop the inevitable.

Within the blink of an eye, Madara's whole body was covered in a layer of green chakra. Hashirama forced it into the Uchiha's flesh, entering every single cell, releasing the energy needed for them to finally continue the vital processes. If Madara's body was unable to create it on its own, he would offer whatever it took to stop cell death.

His clone carefully watched Madara's heart and breathing; if any of it started working again, he would have to cut it off, painful as it was. Since the mitochondria were unable to process oxygen, it would be harmful to let the oxygen-level in the blood rise without any possibility to work it off. Hashirama had to find a way to reset whatever had caused the intercellular processes to clog, but for now… he could at least keep Madara alive if nothing else.

A second clone separated from his back, looking around. Whatever it was that had happened, it had gone fast, probably no more than a minute before the cellular system had failed. Noticing the tea pot, the clone carefully lifted it. Even though a lot had been spilled as the kettle had been knocked over, more than enough remained. The clone spilled a small amount into his palm, licking it off carefully, before spitting it out. "Poison."

The silence around them seemed to grow even heavier, all eyes rested on their Hokage whose chakra surrounded their clanhead fully, causing them to startle as Hashirama laughed in triumph a few minutes later. "Found it", he breathed. Finally! All he had to do now was to get rid of the blocking molecules in the mitochondria-system and they would be able to convert oxygen again. Just a few more minutes, just a little further.

When he got up, the Uchiha leader's head lifelessly sunk to his shoulder, making Hashirama cradle him carefully. "I will take him home with me. And you… will *stay!*"

Giant roots broke out of the earth around them, engulfing the whole building as Hashirama left, making it impossible for anyone to escape unless they attempted to destroy them -which would certainly be prevented by the two wooden clones that had stayed behind, watching the crowd. There were only four people who Hashirama was certain had nothing to do with this; none of the elders would sink to such a low -especially since Makoto had been the one to order him over here- and Izuna would rather kill himself than his beloved brother. Anyone else, however… was a differed matter.

Hashirama didn't know who had dared to attempt killing Madara -in such a manner, no less. Shinobi were exposed to poison from early childhood in order for them to develop an

immunity to at least weaker ones and smaller amounts of the stronger. However; the amount that had been mixed with the tea had been so massive even his own system would have had suffered. A mouthful, maybe two was enough to kill anyone else.

Hashirama felt his gaze darken as anger overwhelmed him once more. Whoever did this… they would pay. He would make them pay!

Chapter End Notes

It's cyanide.
Because if I'm good at something, it's researching on terminal illnesses, deadly poisons and WW2.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

In which Hashirama gets angry.
Never make Hashirama angry.

Chapter Notes

Sooo... I moved last week and tomorrow I'll have my Introduction-class. I'm nervous as hell... but I'm a grown ass woman who writes fanfics and filthy porn in her spare time, so I will get this done!

Also, here's chapter 19. I'm really sorry it took me so long...

“I feel like shit.”

Next to him, Hashirama didn’t stop caressing the Uchiha’s hair, his fingers radiating soothing chakra. “You’ll feel better, soon”, he promised, making Madara finally open his eyes. He was in Hashirama’s bed. His shoes had been taken off, his legs were covered with a blanket.

“Someone spiked my tea.” Hashirama probably already knew, but still. It had been his last thought before succumbing to unconsciousness; the realisation someone was attempting to murder him in the middle of his own clan-meeting.

The soothing touches stopped for a moment, before Hashirama forced himself to calm down. Then, he continued in his caresses; re-arranging black shimmering stands of hair. “Yes”, he confirmed. “I don’t know which poison they used but it stopped your oxygen-metabolization.” He was silent for another moment. “Do you have any idea who might have attempted to kill you?”

Madara huffed, his eyes falling shut again. He felt like he had been stomped on by his own Susano’o. “If you want to elaborate… anyone, basically. I’ve started ordering tea to the meetings years ago. By now, Furoka insists to prepare it. She sets the pot in front of her door and whoever wants to go to the clan-meeting just takes it to the gathering hall. Everyone knows- and everyone could have stopped by and dropped something in. There are enough Uchiha who supported Hotaka attempting to disempower me. But our clan sinking to such lows… kills me.”

No, Hashirama thought furiously. It wouldn't. No matter what, he would never let *that* happen.

"Izuna is downstairs… he was waiting for you to wake up." Madara scanned the house with a short flare of chakra. Tobirama was waiting, as well. "Just get up here", he called. He wanted to get up himself, but his metabolism wasn't too keen on that right now.

A moment later, Izuna entered, shortly followed by Tobirama who closed the door behind himself. Madara propped himself up into a sitting position but didn't attempt to get up. He would spare himself the embarrassment of collapsing on the floor. The younger Senju kept his distance (as usual), while Izuna was at his side immediately. "We will find out whoever did that and make them pay", he promised, making his brother shake his head. "And how do you intend figuring it out?", he asked. "We all know there are enough Uchiha wanting me gone, and I won't take action without having any proof about this."

"You expected this." Tobirama's voice didn't carry a hint of doubt and while Hashirama and Izuna both were taken by surprise, Madara merely nodded. "I expected someone to try and get rid of me, but not in such an… unhonourable way. Killing me with poison is an assassination nobody would be able to take pride in. However, this is actually more concerning, since-" "Since it means whoever attempted to take your life doesn't care about the means to reach their goal", Tobirama finished, making Madara nod.

"I'll still ask Furoka about this; maybe she's seen anything suspicious", Izuna stated. "Or maybe Itatsumi and Hamoku did, they live right next to her, after all."

Madara nodded. "Do that, though I don't think it'll be too successful. I'll continue the clan-meeting tomorrow; there are still-" "You won't do anything tomorrow but stay in bed", Hashirama interrupted, making his best friend scowl. "Don't be a ninny. I have a clan to lead, I can't just-" "Madara." The Uchiha clan-head actually stopped, even though he quirked an eyebrow and allowed Hashirama to continue. "You have been dead." The Senju's voice was way more serious than normal for his mostly cheery self. "Your heartbeat and breathing stopped, your mitochondrial processes collapsed. I had to infuse energy right into the cytoplasts to keep them from degenerating. So, please… For once in your life, just listen to me! Stay in bed, at least for the next two days. If you really want to go tomorrow, I won't stop you, but I will accompany you."

Izuna awaited the inevitable; Madara's outburst of tamper, telling Hashirama to fuck off and storm out of his house, however; his older brother didn't meet his predictions. In fact, he just heaved a very uncharacteristic sigh. "Izuna." The younger Uchiha looked up to meet his brother's eyes. "I believe you can take care of whatever we didn't manage to settle during the meeting. You have my consensus; just decide whatever you think is appropriate."

Izuna blinked, before asking: "Aniki… are you certain about this? It'll be soon enough, even if we-" "I am certain", the older Uchiha interrupted. "This isn't the first time you handle business alone; we've always run the clan together." He felt his eyelids starting to get heavier again and his mind beginning to haze. He had only been awake a few minutes… this was bad, he thought, coughing twice. He could feel his body slumping a little, cursing as his state got worse within not even half a minute.

Gentle hands carefully soothed him back into bed and he could feel a warm palm on his chest, radiating soothing chakra. “Try to sleep some more”, Hashirama advised, making the Uchiha huff. It wasn’t like he had a say in that matter; his body simply shut down.

Not even two minutes later, consciousness left him and Hashirama watched the silent Uchiha. He was pale, paler than usual. Even though his metabolism was working again, it had suffered severely under the strain and was taking up too much energy. Carefully, he let some more medical chakra seep into the raven’s body to soothe the aching body and cover the irritated nervous system in his lungs.

“Anija.” The older Senju looked up from where his fingers gingerly rested on pale skin. “Yes?” “You should visit Two-Tails. Touka told me the Bijuu noticed something was wrong with Madara’s chakra. I’ll leave that up to you, just take care it doesn’t wrack havoc in self-justice.”

It had taken three more days until Madara was finally able to move back into his own house. Hashirama wasn’t too happy, but there wasn’t much he could do to stop him, except maybe tying him to bed with his Mokuton (the temptation was real).

Just like Madara had predicted, neither Izuna nor Tobirama had been able to figure anything out. Whoever it was had most probably just dropped the poison into the teakettle in front of Furoka’s door and left unseen. No traces of chakra, no witnesses. All of them knew this attempt at Madara’s life wouldn’t be the last one and if Hashirama had it his way, he wouldn’t let the Uchiha out of sight; not even out of arm’s reach. But he knew all that would accomplish was making the raven pissed off.

Matatabi had been less than pleased (and that was naming it positively) after Hashirama had told her about the attempt at Madara’s life. It had taken hours for him to make her refrain from personally taking care of this by simply tearing into pieces each and every person in the village and more than once her voice had had the people in Konoha stiffen in fear of her wrath.

The Hokage sighed wearily, finally raising his gaze from the mail that had piled on his desk. Ever since the attempt on Madara’s life, he had been so very unconcentrated; he had to read the same letters thrice to finally understand what they were about. It was dark outside, he noticed, long after midnight. They would get visit from Uzushiogakure soon; some of the Uzumaki considered joining the village, even though most of them preferred Uzu no Kuni. Tobirama was the main connection to them; most of the dialogue was either initiated or answered by him.

He needed to get at least started with planning for their arrival (the date was somewhere in the latest letter, he just couldn’t remember it) but without Tobirama who was way more up to date in that regard and Madara, who was still unable to stay focussed for longer periods of time without getting headaches, he couldn’t seem to get anything done.

The Hokage sighed and shoved the mail aside. Why anyone had ever thought he was any good at this position was beyond him. Madara would have been the way better choice if he

wouldn't be so incredibly stubborn about- within the blink of an eye the Hokage's office was empty before Hashirama had even finished the thought.

During Madara's stay with him, he had refused to leave the raven out of sight; however, even then he had been aware the Uchiha would move back into his own house as soon as he got better. Thus, he had taken precautions. He had carefully molten chakra into the plant-life surrounding the Uchiha clanheads' house, from the single strand of grass to the trees in the backyard, setting up a connection. It was in no way as intense as the one he shared with his own Mokuton, but it was there.

And right now, he felt what they felt, as someone stood in the grass in the shadows of the night, stepping forth from where they had hidden under the trees, straight at the house. There wasn't even a hint of chakra; whoever it was, was extremely advanced in suppressing their chakra flow. Maybe if he was up and paying attention, Madara would have been able to notice something, he was the superior sensor, after all. But without a doubt he would be awake as soon as he heard even the slightest noise, or someone entering the house… Not that he was alone; Izuna was at his side. Attempting to enter the house was suicide for whoever sneaked around it.

Carefully staying in the shadows, the figure pulled something forth, before reaching at the house again to- *"Mokuton!"*

Roots and vines emerged from the ground, tearing the person in their grip backwards, unable to move as they slung tighter, barely leaving enough room to breathe.

"Hashirama!"

Of course… Someone like Madara wouldn't sleep through an outburst of chakra behind his house. Instead, he simply jumped out of the bedroom window just as Hashirama had made it to the house, taking the last steps with him as they rounded the corner together. Hashirama's Mokuton was tightly wrapped around someone in a black cloak, the roots shifting and tightening once more, not even letting the intruder lower the still outstretched hand.

Without any prelude, Madara ripped off the simple, back mask hiding the intruder's face.

"Rikari?", Hashirama asked in surprise, recognising the brunette girl immediately. She was around their age, maybe a little younger. And even more… she was a Senju. What was she doing here? However; before she was able to answer, Madara had taken a single piece of paper out of her outstretched hand, mere inches away from the wall. She tried to hold onto it but didn't stand a chance as Madara effortlessly took it from her. "A seal", he stated. And a powerful one, that was. He had never seen anything like this.

"That's Uzumaki-made", Hashirama recognised immediately.

There was no clan more skilled in the arts of seal crafting than the Uzumaki; this one was their work without any doubt.

"Let me see." Tobirama appeared next to them. Of course, he had been woken by his brother's sharp flares of chakra. He wasn't even clad in nightwear and Hashirama couldn't

help but wonder what was up with his younger brother. He should really start keeping a sleep schedule; depriving his body of necessary rest was harmful in the long run.

For good measure, Izuna appeared next to them, too, obviously being woken by the noise in his backyard.

Within his Mokuton, Rikari started struggling and Tobirama lowered the seal. “How did you get this?”, he asked darkly, making Hashirama frown. “What is it?”

“A sealed Chakra-Vortex, Level A”, the younger Senju answered. Once activated, the seal would start sucking and sealing the nearest chakra-sources and once it was unable to take any more, would mingle the sealed chakra and forcefully infuse it into whoever was closest at the time. Weaker shinobi would be killed by the sheer loss of chakra; stronger ones due to the infusion of contaminated chakra in their system. It wasn’t too far from a failed blood donation, of sorts. There weren’t many people who would be able to survive this and while he was certain Madara normally wouldn’t succumb even to a seal mighty as this, his current state was grave enough Hashirama wasn’t convinced he would survive another blow to his instable system and that thought alone was… more than he could ever take.

“How dare you.”

His chakra flared to life around him; the roots around his clan-member tightening further. “How *dare* you attempting to take his life!” Madara’s eyes flicked towards him; hair blowing in the sheer mass of chakra. The ground beneath them cracked, shortly followed by the wall. Hashirama grit his teeth, his Mokuton retreating and his hand stretching out; wrapping around the woman’s throat. Effortlessly, he let her feet dangle helplessly over the ground, his grip unyielding. His eyes were dark, nearly black with rage. “It wou-would be… best!”

Hashirama’s grip tightened, as he slammed Rikari against the house wall. His chakra rose with each moment, boiling in anger, nearly knocking both, Tobirama and Izuna off their feet. “C-Can’t you see”, the Senju in his iron grip rasped. “He *rules* you! You are the village’s Hokage! But that Uchiha, he… he subdues you, and you don’t even notice! You just obey his every wish; he will… As soon as he is gone, you won’t be under his gen-jutsu anymore!” In the end, her voice got harder to understand, since Hashirama’s fingers dug deeply into her throat.

“I don’t know what illusion you live in”, Madara stated, arms crossed. “But Hashirama isn’t Hokage for nothing and if you don’t even have enough faith in him to-” “Shut up”, the woman snarled. “You should have lost those dreadful eyes afte*rrrgh!*” Her voice broke off as Hashirama slammed her into the wall once more, shutting her up. By now, probably half the village had already woken up. “One more word”, he threatened darkly, leaving no doubt he would carry out his promise, “And I will kill you.”

Even Tobirama seemed stunned at that threat. Yes, he was very aware bis older brother was overprotective of the Uchiha leader, however; he had never, never once threatened someone in such a manner, least of all someone of his own clan. Hashirama’s gentle, caring nature made such a behaviour extremely uncharacteristically for him.

“Hashirama.”

The Hokage's head immediately whipped around.

"Calm down." Madara's voice was nearly gentle and he lowered a palm on Hashirama's shoulder; easily transcending the barrier of the raging Hokage's chakra. "You will regret this in the morning."

Hashirama's usually meek eyes were sparking with rage and anger, his chakra still hadn't soothed, cracking the earth around them as roots and vines sprung to life; angrily bashing towards their master. And yet… His fingers opened and Rikari fell to the ground like a dead weight, gasping for breath. Towering over her, Hashirama's hand had tightened into fists; Madara could see him trembling with rage.

"Are you alright?" It obviously took him a lot of effort to shift his attention away from Rikari and to Madara.

The Uchiha leader nodded, forcing Hashirama to face him in order to catch the movement. "Nothing happened; I am fine. And besides, did you really think I wouldn't notice someone sneaking around and putting seals onto my own house?"

Hashirama blinked, making Madara roll his eyes. "If you seriously consider I'd let my guard down *again* after last week, you're an even bigger moron than I thought. And that's saying something. Now, stop this mess. It isn't you."

Without premise, the bashing chakra disappeared, the plant-life around them calmed and the torn ground started kneading together. Hashirama's tanned fingers caressed the Uchiha's pale cheek, his eyes calming, the gentle glim returning.

"Can't you see, Hashirama-sama?", the woman on the ground rasped, not attempting to get up. "This is exactly what I am talking about! He manipulates you and you don't even realise it! You need to free yourself from his grasp; ever since-" "Rikari." Hashirama's voice was calm again, however; his eyes were unyielding. "I understand you thought you were helping me but attempting to kill Madara is something I will never tolerate, and neither can I leave it without consequence. We will decide about this tomorrow… Tobirama, if you would, please."

The younger Senju stepped forth and took a single sealing-strip out of his pocket, fastening it on the woman's back. Immediately, the four of them could feel her chakra being completely supressed by the seal -another one crafted in Uzushiogakure.

"You will be under arrest until your trial", Tobirama informed her. Rikari had always been loyal, however; this was something none of them had expected. Not even Tobirama, who had been aware of the possibility of the culprit being a Senju -even though he had deemed it unlikely.

He didn't quite know himself how to handle this, however; there had to be consequences. This couldn't just be done with after an apology and some compulsory labour.

It was Madara's wet coughing that broke the silence and in an instant, Hashirama's attention had shifted back to his best friend again. "The cold is poison for your lungs", he muttered.

“Let’s get you inside, I need to check you up.”

Before the Uchiha was even able to argue, Hashirama had already dragged him inside, leaving their two younger brothers alone with Rikari. Izuna’s eyes narrowed. “If you think I’ll let you handle this alone, you’re mistaken”, he proclaimed, making Tobirama roll his eyes. “You aren’t even dressed.”

The younger Uchiha huffed. “Like I give a fuck right now. I’d kill that bitch myself but after Hashirama…” He couldn’t help but be reminded of that very first time when his brother had collapsed on the battlefield and these two Senju had wanted to kill him. Hashirama’s rage had been overwhelming and he hadn’t even hesitated to kill his own clan-members. At least this time, he hadn’t summoned that giant wooden monster.

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

In which nothing works out the way anyone intents it to.

Except for me. Because I write it.

Chapter Notes

Just two weeks? I should be concerned about myself.

But well... I hate stuff like that but I just feel like I need to point it out once. I love writing this story and more than 130 people bookmarked it (a big fat Thank You to all those who did).
I'd just really wish I'd be getting a little more input to it. There's very few of you who write their opinion... and while first, it's of course a huge boost for me to speed up at writing (it's getting harder with my Master studies taking in a lot of time now), most of all I really wish to hear your thoughts about this story as it progresses.
Is it predictable or even worse, boring? Are people out of character? Are the events happening too slow or fast? Did I do a halfway decent job considering my lacking grammar? Yada Yada.
I'll write this story no matter what, but I'd love to read some of your thought, no matter whether it's critique for shortcomings, praise for whatever I did right or anything in between.

But most: Thank you so very much for reading!

With Madara asleep (finally; the coughing fits had lingered longer than they had hoped for) and both of their brothers gone to guard Rikari, Hashirama was left with little to do to calm his wandering thoughts. Instead, he carefully combed raven strands of hair with his fingers, watching the peaceful features of their owner. In afterthought, he had to supress an unbidden chuckle. Of course, Madara wouldn’t let himself be blindsided twice. How foolish of him to think the Uchiha hadn’t taken precautions. He probably should be glad he hadn’t gotten his ass handed to him just for coming to aid unbiddenly.

Hashirama smiled. Madara had always been particularly hot tempered, even for an Uchiha, since they both had been scrawny boys. He still didn’t know what had caused him to utterly lose composure at Rikari, though. Yes; he had been angry at her for attempting to kill Madara but that hadn’t been the cause -well, not all of it. The worst had been the very real possibility

of losing Madara. The idea of him gone, leaving nothing but a gravestone for Hashirama to mourn had caused his charka to riot and he wasn't proud of that.

His gaze lowered back on the sleeping Uchiha. His breaths were still a little rattling but hopefully, they would calm until tomorrow. He lowered his head, lips carefully pressing onto the Uchiha's forehead in a soothing kiss. He had absolutely no idea how to handle Rikari and could only hope Tobirama did come up with something suitable.

Tobirama didn't come up with something suitable. But that was alright because Izuna did.

Konohagakure didn't have an official set of laws so far because up until now they hadn't needed it since everybody still lived by clan-law and frankly spoken they always had had bigger problems to worry about than writing down how to deal with completely hypothetical situations. And besides, attempted murder of clan-leaders wasn't anything new (Hatoko was still in a coma); the matter in which it was performed was.

Therefore, Izuna had decided the only reasonable thing: A public trial. Not, that Tobirama hadn't thought of that as well, it was just the question of how to take the opinion of all of Konoha into consideration. Izuna rolled his eyes at that, claiming that they had to include only a single question on this first trial: Whether Konohagakure was supposed to carry out death penalties or not. Everything from there would only be of interest once they had decided about that.

Thus, Tobirama had woken up every single household in the village (not a huge feat, considering most of them were already awake due to his brother's raging chakra).

Now, a few hours before noon, everyone who wanted to participate had been summoned to the Main Plaza, the one they had held their vote for the village's Hokage. It was more crowded, now that Senju and Uchiha weren't the only clans anymore.

Even though the atmosphere was quite tense -nobody really knew what had happened in the night, all they knew was that Tobirama-sama had asked them to gather at the Plaza- they had their suspicions. After all, there was only one person Hashirama-sama unleashed his inhumane amount of chakra over.

Hashirama and Madara arrived last because Hashirama had been a useless piece of shit who thought Madara needed his sleep more than further stress and thus, had gotten kicked straight to the Plaza by an Uchiha leader with hair even more unruly than usual when they arrived ten minutes late.

"I refuse to be sorry for putting your health first!"

"Fucking shame because I don't give a shit!"

"You should! You still have problems considering the mitochondrial oxygen processes in your lungs and the cold didn't help!"

“Stop mother-henning me, you useless Senju! You are Hokage for Kami’s sake, this village is your greatest concern, not my fucked-up health!”

There was an audible taking in of breath from the crowd in front of them. This was the first time, the very first Uchiha Madara had openly admitted his bad health condition. Everything up to now had been rumours and while Yes, it was no secret he had been sick, the Uchiha-leader had never openly admitted that. Besides, Hashirama-sama was the greatest medical shinobi in history; healing Madara-sama should have been a piece of cake. And yet the issue arose again and again, even though nobody knew how dire it was at any time -except the very first time when he had fainted back when they still had been at war.

If even Hashirama-sama was unable to heal the Uchiha leader, his condition had to be catastrophic. And yet, Madara-sama never complained, never retreated, always put the village first… and in return, Hashirama-sama put him first. For more than a few, that had been the reason to vote for the Senju as their Hokage.

“Would you care for us to take a break until you’re done?” Tobirama’s more than slightly irritated voice interrupted the bickering pair, making Madara huff. The day Hashirama would finally see sense would be a cold one in hell (which, for an Uchiha, would be way more uncomfortable than the usual flames that were supposed to be there, not that it mattered in this context).

The two clan-leaders, their younger brothers and the elders had gathered on the same stage they had previously used to count the votes, except now they had added another chair for Ichigo as the Yamanaka clanhead. Next to them, forced into place by another seal, stood Rikari.

“Your brother is a useless idiot”, Madara told the younger Senju, making him refrain from rolling his eyes -if barely. It was no secret Hashirama wasn’t a mastermind at most times. To put an end to this embarrassing scene, he stepped forward, facing the gathered people. “The attempted assassination of Madara during the last Uchiha clan-meeting is no secret”, he started. The word had spread even faster than they had anticipated. “Last night, Rikari was caught attempting to seal a Chakra-Vortex at the Uchiha clanheads’ house.” Some rather shocked sounding murmurs from the crowd interrupted Tobirama and to his (and everyone else’s) surprise, all of them were Senju. “This situation is a novum”, he continued after a few seconds of waiting. “Neither of us are certain how to proceed, since none of us have been prepared on an assassination attempt at the clanheads. Therefore, we have decided to let the people of Konoha participate in this trial.”

Izuna stepped at his side, unrolling a scroll. “Senju Rikari is hereby accused of double attempted assassination of the clanhead Uchiha Madara, once by poison, once by sealing techniques”, he declared. “It is up for debate, whether Konohagakure’s law system will include death penalty for felonies of such graveness or refrain from carrying out such ultimate ways of punishment.” He lowered the scroll, carefully rolling it back together, before speaking up again. “As fitting for trial, Senju Rikari may defend her cause now.” Denial would be useless, though, since four people had witnessed the incident at night -even more so since they were the main authorities in their clans, elders aside.

However, Rikari didn't do any of that. Instead, she turned to the crowd, attempting to step forth but hindered by the seal on the ground. "Hashirama-sama is the greatest leader the Senju clan ever had", she proclaimed proudly. "He defeated the Uchiha leader", but that was worth nothing since Madara-sama had been on the very verge of death, even Senju acknowledged that fact, "And created Konohagakure. He is the Hokage, the beloved leader of this village! And yet he is under the spell of *that* Uchiha! He dares to command our beloved leader as if he was nothing but a lackey, more than once publicly attempted to injure him! Whatever gen-jutsu he uses to force Hashirama-sama to do his bidding, I refused to let him continue! I was very aware I didn't stand a chance in a fight, but I had to free our Hokage of these cursed eyes!

You heard him talk just now, you did hear him humiliate Hashirama-sama openly, just as he does at every situation presenting itself. I will do anything to free our Hokage out of whatever clutches that cursed Uchiha hold him in, even if I have to scratch out these hexed eyes of his myself! I will-"

"Rikari." Hashirama's voice was gentle but unyielding as he interrupted his clan-member. "I will not let you continue casting aspersions on Madara's name. Your statement is closed."

The crowd remained silent.

Of course, Madara-sama and Hashirama-sama bickered at every situation presenting itself. Madara had a temper even hotter than his Katon and Hashirama just triggered it continuingly. Everyone had by now at least witnessed one of their infamous quarrels. And yet everyone was also very aware Madara would be the first one to defend Hashirama with all his might whenever need arose. Just as their Hokage would do anything in his (nothing but inhuman) power to protect the Uchiha leader.

If it came down to it, everyone -Senju and Uchiha more so than Yamanaka- were aware they would rather die in battle than let the other get hurt. They simply had very different ways of showing that position.

Besides, Hashirama-sama could be a bit overwhelming on a good day and Madara-sama had certainly had his fair share of that.

However, that didn't- *"You!"*

Hashirama blanched. Oh no, he had forgotten- how could he have forgotten? Oh, yes, he had been guarding Madara's bed all night, there hadn't been a possibility to get away. Well, he could have sent one of his wooden clones but hadn't even thought of that. Alright then, he would- the ground shook beneath their feet. *"You sought to kill him! You!"*

Waves of foul chakra rolled through the village, making people blanch at the sheer amount. There wasn't any doubt about who -or what, depending on the view- was the source.

An inhuman roar nearly made their teeth clatter and Hashirama turned around. "Ah! Please, don't crush any of the buildings!"

But Matatabi didn't care. She buried two houses under her giant flaming paws but made sure to refrain from squashing people. Ashura loved them, he had told her and if Ashura loved them, Matatabi wouldn't kill them unless they tried to kill her, first.

She had been asleep today, longer than usual and it had taken her some time to notice the gathering of humans in her brothers' village. She hadn't been too interested in whatever the white-haired man Ashura called his younger brother said and the talk of that other woman had even been less worth of listening. However, the very moment she talked about eyes, Matatabi had raised her head. There was only one pair of eyes worthy of listening for and she had put the pieces together quickly, remembering the first parts of that woman's rant even though she hadn't been paying too much attention.

That was the one who had wanted to kill Indra. The one who had tried to feed him poison. And she was screaming how much she hated him, hated her brother for whatever reason Matatabi didn't bother to fully understand, wanted to scratch out his eyes, his precious truth-seeing eyes he had always taken so much pride in.

There was only one thing that mattered right now.

"You sought to take him from us!", she roared, blue flames blazing even brighter than usual as she towered above them, giant paws carefully -or as careful as she could in her rage- positioned between the houses Ashura had asked her not to crush. In comprehension to the buildings, she looked even larger than usual (and that was saying something).

"Matatabi."

"Brother." The Bijuu's attention didn't waver from the human who had tried to take her brother from them. Tried to take him again, ages after the first time and yet it seemed like yesterday. However, her voice had gentled as it always did when talking to her youngest brother. He had never been one for violence or shouting, his kind soul didn't stand it well. "I will ask you, because I wish not to upset you. Is this who tried to take Indra from us?"

Hashirama was silent for a moment, but he knew he couldn't lie. He should have gone to Matatabi during the night to talk to her and explain, however; he had failed. "Yes", he therefore answered.

Matatabi screamed. A scream only Bijuu were able to cast, bone-rattling, ground shaking, ear-piercing. She had lost Indra once. She would not lose him again, not this time. Not this time, when things finally, finally could be good after all these ages of solitude and hate and anger.

Rikari's scream went nearly unheard, drowning in the Two-Tail's rage, as she clutched her head. Blue flames erupted from beneath her, making her thrash against the seal's borders in a desperate attempt to escape as they licked their way up her legs. Feasting on her skin first, then eating her alive until the coaled flesh stopped carrying her and she fell to the ground, her face right into the seething fire.

Her screams shouldn't be able to become even louder, but they were.

And finally, silence spread amongst them, nothing to hear but the remains of a slowly dying fire, leaving behind a piece of coaled remains of a body. On the ground, the seal still kept intact. Uzumaki work was hard to break.

“We will protect you”, Matata declared, her claws leaving scratches in the streets that would take days to repair. “We failed, last time… We failed and you killed Indra and hated us and left us for what we thought would final… but this time, we will protect you!”

Hashirama sighed. This had gone exactly the way neither him nor Madara had wished to. However; he was surprised -maybe even concerned- how little he mourned the death of his clan member. Rikari had been a Senju; not the strongest fighter but loyal and devoted to her clan. Too devoted, apparently.

“Well”, Izuna stated wryly, after a few minutes of way too long silence, “For all those of you who would have opposed death penalty… Sorry for bothering you.”

“Indra.”

Madara sighed inwardly. Both, him and Hashirama had by now gotten used to the Tailed Beasts sticking to these foreign names of long dead men. “Matatabi”, he answered calmly.

“I am sorry for stealing your revenge”, the giant cat offered, lowering her head to show her honesty. “Are you feeling well?”

“Rarely ever been better”, Madara drawled, watching the coaled remains of Senju Rikari. While her death hadn’t been his goal, it was at least another nuisance dealt with. He turned around, meeting the unusually silent crowd. He took a step forth. “Hashirama is an air-head, a fucking do-gooder with a healing complex, who expects the whole world is just waiting to be saved by him.” He could feel the Senju’s head slamming downwards behind him and made a pause, crossing his arms, not turning around to confirm his assumption. Then, he continued. “There is nobody else I respect more for his unwavering faith in humanity and his unfaltering efforts to ensure peace instead of bloodshed.”

“He is under the spell of that *Uchiha!”*

No…

“I will cut out his eyes! That way, he won’t be able to keep Hashirama-sama in his gen-jutsu!”

No! It was no gen-jutsu, and he wasn’t under any spell either!

Blood splattered, Madara’s blood. He wasn’t certain how he knew it was his, even though Madara himself was nowhere to be seen. Where was he? What had they done to him?

“Take his eyes! We’ll use them for the safety of the village!”

How dare they? Protecting the village had always been Madara's uttermost priority, ever since its creation! He had sacrificed his eyesight, his health, nearly his life, to do so!

"He humiliates Hashirama-sama at every opportunity he gets! Just listen to him; there isn't a single day he is not insulted!"

No, no, that wasn't true. That just was how Madara was; there was no one who cared as much as him, easily willing to die to protect those he held dear. He just couldn't admit it the way others did! Madara had always had a sharp tongue, never once hesitating to call him on his shit. But he wouldn't be Madara if he wouldn't. Wouldn't be the boy he had been friends with when they had been children all these years back, the one who bullied the confession about Itama's death out of him, helped him deal with the pain, starting to plan a village that wouldn't come to fruition until over a decade later, when he had been on the verge of death to save his last remaining brother.

Without that, all of it, the straightforwardness, the name-calling, the tears and laughter they had shared, the fights, the fear and pain, Madara wouldn't be the one he had, somewhere along the way, fallen in-

"Madara! *Madara!*"

The Uchiha clanhead bolted upright in his bed, as Hashirama burst through the window, straight into his bedroom, eyes wide, still clad in his sleepwear.

"You do realise you're going to pay for that broken window?", he asked, however, Hashirama didn't even seem to hear him. Instead, he rushed over to where the raven was sitting in his bed, clasping his face with large, warm palms. What the fuck was wrong with him this time? How did he even have any working braincells left inside of that thick, stubborn head of his? Probably out of nothing but spite. "I love you!"

Madara blinked. "What?"

"I love you", Hashirama repeated, brown eyes shining with joy.

"The fuck is wrong with you?!"

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

With Hashirama moping around, no one has an easy life.

Chapter Notes

After my last note, so many of you decided to write me. Thank you SO much!
My studies are eating up most of my time right now; I don't have the time to write nearly as much anymore (is that a legit sentence? It is now, I guess). But I love it and I'm so happy! Thanks to all of you who care!

Here's just a small thought of mine considering Madara, since I am aware my version of him doesn't completely overlap with Kishimoto's:
When writing him, I imagine the Madara we got to see during Hashirama's flashback; the boy Hashirama used to play and train with. The older Madara got, the more bitter he got, due to his experiences -especially Izuna's death. He is spared these traumas in this AU; therefore I imagine him as an ingenious shinobi with one hell of a temper and zero patience for bullshit but nevertheless willing to sacrifice everything for his people.

Hashirama blinked. Wrong? Nothing was wrong. Exactly the opposite; for the first time in months everything felt perfectly right.

“I dreamed about you”, he explained, his joyous expression faltering slightly. “It was… they… wanted to take your eyes”, he murmured, slowly moving his hand to trace the delicate bone structure of Madara’s face. “And I… I couldn’t do anything; I was bound to listen to them talking about you and-” “Hashirama.” Madara’s voice was gentler than usual as he interrupted the Senju. “You had a nightmare. You overreacted. Calm down and go back to sleep; in the morning things will be much clearer.”

However; Hashirama, stupid blockhead he was, shook his head. “This is the clearest things ever have been for me”, he answered. “Because I realised that the boy whom I had been my best friends with years and years ago, when we both were children dreaming of a better life, was the very same man I had fallen in love with somewhere along the way. Even during all our fights, Madara, there was nothing, not ever once, I found I could hate about you. I loved the way you moved, from your feet to your fingers, to your lips whenever you’d send another Katon at me. And then we finally made peace… and the more time we’d spent together, the more our friendship rekindled, the deeper I felt. I just… I just never understood, you know? That the urge to feel you, to keep you close, to touch and kiss you, wasn’t just some

abhorrent way of friendship but-" Madara lifted his hand, stopping him in his metaphorical tracks. His fingers were pale and slender, nearly unfittingly so for a shinobi, however; holding the key for inhumane destruction upon forming a single sign and burning entire landscapes to ashes. Hashirama's own hands suddenly felt large and clumsy and he couldn't supress a smile. Out of all the things Madara could make him feel inferior, his subconscious chose his hands.

"Hashirama", the Uchiha finally spoke up, interrupting his thoughts. "You have always been emotional; it's part of who you are. But you are barking on the wrong tree here -pun about your Mokuton not intended. You are my friend, the very first I ever had." Hashirama's eyes widened. Madara had never told him. However, before he was able to ponder further about this, the raven went on with his speech. "But you've always felt over-responsible for me and now you're overreacting because you-"

Warm lips forced the Uchiha to interrupt his attempt at talking sense into his best friend. Hashirama was warm, he always was. Fitting, since Madara despite his chakra-nature was cold rather often; probably due to his fucked up physical condition. Lips moved on his mouth, bidding it to open and a long palm clasped the hand he had lifted to interrupt Hashirama in his rant. Fingers, warm and unyielding, wove with his own and refused to let go again, as a warm, hard body pressed him back into the sheets.

His eyes closed halfway, and he could feel Hashirama lowering on his forearms, as to not crush him under his weight. He had survived two decades of ever-lasting war; Hashirama wouldn't kill him by falling on him in his own bed now, the buffoon.

Strong fingers caressed his cheek, carefully tracing the underlying bone-structure with the pad of a calloused thump and he felt his lips opening as his own free hand -the one Hashirama didn't still hold captive next to his head- caressed a few strands of brunet hair flowing down the Senju's shoulders.

He gasped when he felt Hashirama's tongue lick his lower lip, before entering his mouth and he felt a sound not too far from a moan escape him. Finally, the foreign tongue met his own, caressing it ever so carefully. Hashirama's fingers still wandered on his face in featherlight touches.

"Stop this."

Hashirama immediately retreated, taking the feeling of warmth with him, even though he still was no more than half an arm length away. "If you claim to feel nothing, I'll know you lie", he murmured. "Because you *do*. Just as I do. You just don't-"

"I am no doll."

Hashirama's eyes widened at the sudden accusation. "Of course, you aren't. You would never let anyone decide on you; you are the most headstrong person I ever met."

Meanwhile, Madara's eyes narrowed. "As usual, your skull is too thick to come up with anything useful. Stop treating me like a fucking doll, Hashirama. I am not made out of

porcelain and I won't break at being touched too harsh. It is disgusting. Now, get out of my house, I am trying to sleep."

"Hokage-sama is moping."

The Uchiha at the other side of the table rolled her eyes. "What else is new."

The four of them laughed. An Uchiha, two Senju and a Yamanaka, sitting in a bar and drinking sake. What sounded like the beginning of a bad joke -and would have meant certain death for at least three of them not too long ago- was reality. All four of them -Senju Daruzo, Uchiha Nanashi, Yamanaka Kenuchi and Senju Ayumi- had recently taken up their new responsibilities as Team-Leaders of the village's Academy. Their clan-leaders had decided on teams of three, led by a Sensei who was responsible for both, their safety and battle-progress alike. The decision hadn't been easily made and they were very aware none of the older clan-members had been called to such a position. The Hokage, his (unwilling) advisor and their little brothers rejected the traditional way of teaching; a way everyone was aware had been painful for all of them but even more so for the Senju-clanhead. And while they had intended to meet up and discuss progress -and maybe even trouble- in their groups or exchange ideas and concepts, the conversation had quickly stirred to their Hokage and his current mood.

The unusually red-haired Yamanaka took another sip of his sake. "When we first heard of the village, I thought Senju and Uchiha joining forces was the most unbelievable thing to happen in this century. But then, a bunch of Tailed Beasts showed up at our doorstep and right now I somehow don't dare correcting my prediction, because I really don't want to jinx it."

That had the rest of them laughing again, before the oldest of them, Daruzo, snorted. "If I learned anything about Hashirama-sama and Madara-sama, it is you can always rely on their drama."

Nanashi -raven-haired, as to be expected since she was Uchiha- lifted an equally dark eyebrow. "So, we're going to complain about your clan-head being a wet blanket but not about the giant flaming cat living right next to our village that killed one of your clan-members?" She leaned back on her chair.

Ayumi gestured at the bar for another round of sake before turning back to the table. Despite being the physically smallest of their group, she could keep her liquor better than everyone else in her clan -Hokage aside. "We could also talk about your clan-head and his moods, instead", she offered, making the young Uchiha groan. However, before she was able to answer, Daruzo spoke up, voice firm, maybe even a little grim. "Rikari was always loyal and it is understandable she was worried about Hashirama-sama. He tends to be… flimsy, none of us deny that fault of his. But there would have been other ways to express her concerns. She bought her fate upon herself."

"I know Uchiha always had a special link to cats and cat summons, but I think a cat-bijuu is a little much, even for Madara-sama", Daruzo claimed, having the rest of them nod emphatically.

“Madara-sama is terribly moody ever since that day”, Nanashi complained, making the three of her companions laugh once more. As if Uchiha Madara wasn’t terribly moody every other day, too. It was strange, somehow. Despite their Hokage and the Uchiha leader being so very different, they still had in common a tendency to overreact in social norms… just at different ends of the spectre. A new round of drinks was served and Ayumi happily downed the last of her old cup before taking on the new one.

As of now, Hashirama had been in low spirits for four days straight; ever since the failed trial of Rikari. Maybe the Two-Tails killing her had taken its toll of him, even though he had seemed rather calm about that at the day.

Strangely enough, Madara hadn’t sought him out yet to tell him to quit being a useless failure as he usually would. Maybe, Rikari’s accusation about his behaviour had influenced him, too…

“Do you consider Madara-sama’s behaviour humiliating towards our Hokage?”, Kenuchi finally was the first one to articulate the issue. He had made sure to phase the question neutral, however; the others caught up to his intention. Daruzo spoke up after a pause that might have been a little too long. “Of course, it is.” He downed his liquor in one go. “However; that simply is the way Madara-sama works. If he intended to truly humiliate Hashirama-sama, he would do so in a way neither, our Hokage nor us would consider entertaining anymore.”

Nanashi snorted. “Should I be worried about you analysing my clan-head’s personality after only a little more than a year of *not* being at war with us?”

“Hashirama-sama doesn’t have many people he can consider his equal”, Ayumi sighed, the alcohol making her sympathise easier. “I believe he is happy to have someone who doesn’t hesitate to tell him off in a way nobody else -aside, perhaps from Tobirama-sama- is able to do. No matter what, he can always be certain Madara-sama will be honest with him, even if-”
“Even if that means chasing him across the village and threatening to cut off his testicles”, Daruzo snorted, trying to take a sip from his cup before noticing he had taken the empty one on accident and making a face. They had way too many sake-cups on the table.

“The same goes for Madara-sama, as well, by the way”, Nanashi piped in, receiving three sets of disbelieving stares. She rolled her eyes. “Are you blind?”, she complained. “Madara-sama is one of the most intelligent shinobi of our time”- even the Yamanaka confirmed so and *that* was a feat on its own- “But he tends to be too impulsive and is stubborn to a fault. And while Izuna-sama certainly takes the edge of it at most times, there is no one able to keep him grounded like Hokage-sama does.”

That was… Kenuchi blinked. “Certainly interesting.”

Certainly interesting indeed, the single figure at the faraway corner of the bar thought. Thank Kami, nobody bothered with hooded, silent figures looming in corners when living alongside Uchiha.

When Zetsu had felt the sudden decline of chakra five days ago, he had screamed in frustration. When the Mangekyou Sharingan of who once was Indra had even further risen in

power, he had been overjoyed. Things had been working out incredibly well even without him actively taking action yet. With every passing day, he got closer and closer to finally freeing Mother of her prison, to finally setting right what had been wrongs eons ago. And then… and then Indra's chakra had basically dropped out of existence.

After all the hopes he had kindled in Zetsu, he had *dared* dying, had *dared* ruining the only chance he had in freeing Mother! The chakra had stabilized just above zero some time after, and then started rising again, but there was no doubt that for a few moments, the shell of Indra's chakra had been dead.

Zetsu had made way back to Konohagakure immediately but once he realised the Two-Tails presence he had been forced to slow down as to not be noticed unbiddenly. The Tailed Beasts had never met him, probably didn't know of his existence. But there was no way he would take another risk, not when things had been working out so unpredictably.

However; for the moment it seemed the loss of the All Seeing Eyes had been averted. But the incident pressed him once more into speeding up is plans; there was no way he could wait for the perfect circumstances anymore. No matter what, if the eyes were lost, everything was, after all.

Blood dripped from his arm in a steady slow trickle, as he leaped aside to avoid being slashed by a giant blade. He was annoyed Hashirama had managed to get to his arm but if he was honest with himself (he didn't want to be, that basically was the main issue in this whole affair), he had provoked it. He had slipped up because he had to know if Hashirama would take the chance. Had to know if he would take advantage of the opening he had been giving… and he had. Hashirama's broad sword had sliced his flesh neatly, the red blooming blood proving so even more than the pain.

And then he had taken on his advantage, forced Madara to retreat a little before the grip on his Gunbai strengthened again.

This morning, Hashirama had knocked on his door (not the front-door, mind you, but his bedroom door because Izuna the disloyal little shit had let him in) and asked for a training session, wearing sadness like a blanket. If that was because Madara had refused to speak to him for four days straight, the Uchiha didn't care.

That, however, didn't explain why he was here because he couldn't recall agreeing to this. It just kind of happened and if Hashirama wouldn't be a lame duck in the casting of gen-jutsu (even though he had absolutely no problems in the matters of breaking them), his guess would be to have been captured in one and brought along. What was it with Hashirama always getting his way?

"I love you."

Madara tripped, nearly missing a parry before catching up again. "That was a low move, Hashirama, even for-" "But I do." The Senju smiled at him, even while parrying Madara's katana with full force. The clash of metal had them way too close. "I think it started during

the first fight we were forced into, after breaking our friendship." He leaped aside to avoid being crushed by a blow of his opponent's Gunbai. That battle-fan was a lethal in Madara's hands.

"I cried myself to sleep the night after, because I couldn't find a spark of affection, of friendship in your eyes, no matter how hard I looked. It felt as though you had abandoned me, carved me out of your heart and-" Madara's kunai had appeared out of seemingly nothing but thin air, slicing his thigh before the Senju was able to block or evade. However; Hashirama simply danced aside before he could be surprised by a second strike. "And I had never felt more alone", he continued, bis blade clashing with Madara's once more. "Because if all our friendship and shared moments were nothing to you, then why did I feel as though you ripped at my heart? And with each fight, the desperation clawed deeper, with each fight I hoped to find a flicker of what we had shared-" "I couldn't." Madara's voice was too quiet, nearly inaudible in the clash of metal on metal, just about disappearing in a breeze.

Had Hashirama's reaction been just a little more ungraceful, one could have assumed he stumbled. The fight stopped, Madara's katana at the Senju's throat. "You couldn't?", he whispered in disbelief, feeling the blade hovering just above his skin. "But it would have been so very simple…"

Madara grit his teeth, not lowering his katana. How was it Hashirama always, always got him to talk about things better left unsaid? "I could not. Because if I had let myself feel, even for just a moment, the echo of what I lost on that day, I would have clawed out my eyes on the battlefield."

Hashirama suddenly felt his tongue awkwardly sitting in his mouth; hot and sluggish. "You…" But… but… of course! Madara was an Uchiha; the brightest shining example of one. And if there was one thing to know about them, it was the depth of their emotions. No other clan was able to feel the all-consuming love they could, even begin to understand the sacrifices they were willing to make… or succumb the depth of their hate once it was enflamed. It was common knowledge -had been even during the war- that some Uchiha had committed suicide due to unrequited love or falling into madness in the past.

"You protected yourself", he whispered. "You refused to acknowledge me, us, anything, because if you hadn't, you would have…" He couldn't finish. Madara had essentially shut down his emotions, allowing only hate and pugnacity, to refrain from succumbing to despair, succumbing to what he had lost on that fateful day… and didn't Hashirama know best how very deep the raven's emotions ran? The prospect of Madara on the battlefield in front of him, screaming in agony as he maimed his own face in pure madness… "I'm sorry."

His tanned hands clasped the pale face in front of him. "I am sorry… I am so sorry. I let it come to this, I hurt you, and I'm so, *so* sorry I didn't try harder. I love you."

He could feel the muscles in Madara's cheek tensing. "Stop this."

"No." Hashirama's forehead lowered meet to his. "I thought I had to give you up once already and I mourned you every single day since." His hands wandered to the mount of Madara's hair, burying in the stands of back and midnight-blue. "I won't let you leave again."

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

In which you'll never guess who steps in for a visit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hashira-ah!” Madara’s gasps were honey to him, as the Uchiha writhed underneath him. His pale skin glistened with sweat. Hashirama leaned down, licking a pearl of salty liquid from his throat.

Madara’s eyes fell shut and Hashirama felt the smooth skin of his length under his fingers, caressing and stroking. His own cock was achingly hard, however; he would take care of that later. For now, he was preoccupied otherwise.

“I love you”, he whispered, carefully adjusting Madara’s head to the side a little and smoothing his tangled black locks out of the way, before lowering his head and licking the skin; sinking his teeth into the smooth, pale flesh. He could feel the blood pouring underneath, as he forced a mark onto the white throat.

His fingers wandered on skin stretched just a little too tightly around the ribs -Madara still hadn’t gained the weight he would wish for- caressing the wiry muscle decorating his chest, before his thumps found pale nipples- “Hashirama!”

“Fuck!”

On the other side of the door, Tobirama huffed. “Language”, he chided half-heartedly, more due to the fact Hashirama chastised him more often than not for it, before getting back to the point. “You have a meeting with clan-heads, promised to visit the Academy, Hibiko ordered you to have lunch with her since you’re the only one able to treat her arthritis and when you’re done, we finally need to catch on the paperwork considering the village’s merchants since they’re getting rather upset by being excluded by now. Get your ass up.”

Hashirama didn’t even groan. His cock was achingly hard, his fingertips still tingled with the feeling of Madara’s skin and his day was so busy he didn’t even know how to cram all of his schedule within.

He grasped his erection, closing his eyes and wished slender, pale finger in place of his own, as he stroked himself to a hurried release, carefully keeping his chakra controlled.

The only upside of having his evening filled with never-ending supplies of paperwork was that he got to work on it alongside Madara in his office. Both, Tobirama and Izuna were absorbed in work, as well, and thus didn't notice the Hokage's eyes getting caught by a streak of moonlight illuminating raven hair, candlelight reflections on pale skin or eye lashes casting long shadows on high-boned cheeks.

Hashirama yearned so very much for this man, the ache was all but physical. He wanted to touch him, hug him, kiss him, love him, protect him with all his might as to never let any harm befall him… and didn't fight to supress the smile sneaking its way on his face. He should keep these craves to himself; otherwise he would only get himself kicked into another mountain.

"Spar with me?"

Madara met his eyes, face unimpressed. "It is way after midnight."

Hashirama smiled sheepishly. "I've been running errands all day, going to bed now would be in vain unless I get rid of all that pent-up energy first."

"Sounds great; otherwise Aniki won't let me sleep, either." Izuna didn't even raise his eyes from his papers as carelessly made a shooing notion in their general direction. "I'll finish this and then head to bed. See you in the morning."

Madara's eyes narrowed. "You're a nuisance."

"I love you, too, brother dearest."

The Uchiha leader flipped his little brother off and filed away one last document, before making his way to the training grounds, Hashirama right beside him. The farthest one, as they wouldn't want to wake every single sensor in their village (or accidentally tear down houses).

"I love you."

Madara didn't return the sentiment but he didn't tell him off, either, so Hashirama decided to mark the raven's silence as progress, as they arrived at the barren field. While he had only hoped before, he was absolutely certain by now the Uchiha felt equally. However; Madara was probably the proudest person he knew; admitting his love for his (former) best friend was a long run for him. Good thing, Hashirama loved challenges -especially the ones Madara confronted him with. On some days, nightmares still haunted him; visions of Madara drifting farther and farther away, of the Uchiha's eyes being fired by hatred and his own stupide of not realising the raven's suffering.

Of his own feelings of powerlessness as he watched himself -the dream-lookalike that was just like him but all… wrong- determined to kill the threat he took Madara for, since he was convinced he had to, to protect the village.

Each time, he woke up right before delivering what he knew would be the killing strike, bile in this throat. One day, he would -leap aside to not get his calves cut by Madara's scythe.

“Get your head out of those pink clouds and start fighting”, the raven ordered, making Hashirama chuckle as he twirled back. “Yes, love.”

Sparring with Madara was exhausting, since both refused to back down, demanding nothing but the very best of each other. It probably had gotten way too late (or early, depending on one’s view) and Hashirama would regret the lack of sleep tomorrow (today?) but there was no way he would stop now. They had worked themselves up by now; Hashirama’s metabolism was on high alert, already having healed a cracked rib and a second-degree burn while Madara’s Sharingan had sprung to life, rotating hypnotizingly. Hashirama yearned to heal the gash at the Uchiha’s thigh, but that would have to wait until they were done.

They leaped apart, sacrificing a moment to take each other in, before- “Hokage.”

The two clan-heads whirled around, as an unfamiliar figure appeared from between the trees. His face was mostly hidden beneath a simple black mask covering everything but his eyes; piercing green irises surrounded by a red sclera each. His dark hair had been carelessly grown out all the way to his chin; on his forehead, however, stroke a gleamed a protector with an unknown emblem.

How had they not noticed this man’s presence? He was broadly built, with skin just as tanned as Hashirama’s and obviously hadn’t just arrived. Before he even was able to answer, Madara was at his back, shielding it with his own body while keeping his swirling Mangekyou on the stranger. He was a sensor, he should have noticed this shinobi -he had to be one, for what else could he be- long before, even with his supressed chakra. Had he been this engaged in his spar with Hashirama?

“Good evening”, Hashirama greeted politely, nonetheless. “May I ask what you are doing on Konoha’s grounds in the middle of the night?”

“I have been ordered to kill you.”

Madara watched the intruder for a moment, ready to strike but at the same time not doubting for even a second, Hashirama and him would be able to take their opponent down. “You are doing a piss-poor job so far”, the Uchiha informed him, making the masked man lean on the tree he was standing in front of, arms crossed. “I am under no illusion I could win against the Hokage and you in any battle”, he answered. “One of you alone, I might have considered under circumstances most suited for me. This, however… is a suicide mission.”

“Then why have you agreed in the first place?” Hashirama was genuinely confused by this man. He had appeared out of nothing but thin air in the middle of the night, with orders of killing him, only to tell them of his mission and then apparently… not acting on it?

The intruder remained unfazed. “I said I was ordered; I never mentioned to have had choice. It was either taking on this mission and returning with news of your death… or be killed by the village’s leaders.”

“Hold on.” Hashirama leaned forward. “Another village? A shinobi-village?”

The masked man raised a dark brow. “Shinobi-villages have formed in great number after your treaty with the Uchiha. Clans fear being overpowered, countries -especially the smaller ones- fear destruction. It is only natural in such a state to align with each other.”

Hashirama’s eyes widened. “We would never attack unprovoked! This village was formed to enable peace between our clans, to stop the endless fighting. Not to encourage it!” He blinked. “Is that why you have been sent to kill me? To stop Konoha from flourishing?”

“Ah, so you are not just as dense as rumours go”, the stranger mused. “Yes. I have been ordered by Takigakure’s leader to ensure your death… or be killed myself. I am sure you understand failure is no option.”

The Hokage shook his head, eyes mourning. “All we wanted was peace! How could it have gone so very wrong?” Then, he looked up, meeting the stranger’s piercing eyes. “What can I do to help?”

Madara had to bite back a laugher as he watched the green irises widening. Leave it to Hashirama to attempt and help his assassin. “You obviously have no intention to even try carrying out that mission”, he concluded. “A good choice, since you would be dead by now, otherwise. Just leave and you won’t-” “Move to Konoha!”

The Uchiha leader felt a vein on his forehead throb, before kicking Hashirama’s knee hollow, nearly making the joint buckle and sending the Hokage face-planting. “You fucking idiot!”

“Madara”, the Kami no Shinobi whined -actually whined!-, turning around to face his advisor, leaving his back unprotected to the masked man. “We can’t just force him to leave! Not if they will kill him for refusing to assassinate me!”

“I am certain his refusal to attempt to kill you isn’t rooted in his tender, caring heart, you ninny!”

The foreign shinobi actually huffed a laugher at that. “If is good to know, at least one of you isn’t delusional.”

Hashirama pouted, before crossing his arms. By now, it was probably closer to morning than night… he had a meeting with the elders soon and they would only bicker at him if he didn’t get anything done. But still, there was no way he would just send away this man! Not after he had openly refused to carry out the mission he had been forced into. “It doesn’t matter, why! I won’t send him back to his village, only to be killed!”

Madara muttered something inscrutable under his breath -probably containing a lot of insults- before stepping aside to probably face the stranger, demanding: “Fight me.”

“Madara!”, Hashirama cried, affronted, however; the Uchiha ignored his Kage. “Let’s see if you’re any good”, he continued, before turning towards Hashirama once more. “Make some space.” “But this isn’t-” “Fuck off.” Hashirama recognised a lost cause, when he saw it -well, mostly, he did- and thus, stepped back.

“Well, then. Let us see what you’re good for.”

He hadn't finished speaking before the stranger leaped at him with a speed he hadn't expected. Madara sidestepped, sending his scythe towards him, however; the weapon missed its target, making the Uchiha twirl in a perfect somersault. For his bulk, the man was incredibly fast and Madara smiled as he easily avoided being caught by his Sharingan. "You dance well; your step is fast", he acknowledged. His opponent even refrained from using any weapons but a few kunai, obviously being a close-range fighter. To get a rise of him, Madara put some distance between himself and the man.

His brows rose in surprise as a tangle of black fibres emerged from the man's left shoulder; forming a mouth and releasing a sequence of raiton-jutsu in rapid fire.

"So, not just close range", Madara acknowledged, making his opponent answer: "I will fight whatever range needed", before countering one of the Uchiha's Katon with a suiton-jutsu emerging from his other shoulder blade… without even forming signs. Hashirama's eyes lit up. "These summons have a body of their own", he realised. "Even their own heartbeat! That's… incredible! How do you manage to store them within your body?"

He didn't immediately get an answer as the masked man was too busy keeping up with Madara, who had by now fastened his step. He had never fought such a pellicular opponent before; his fighting style was unique and his speed matched Hashirama's, even though he would be no threat in an actual fight to the God of Shinobi -there was only one person alive, who was, after all.

His opponent called forth the black summon from his left shoulder, making Madara prepare for another ration-jutsu, however; this time it was fire that was being send at him; cutting down some trees next to him as he evaded the attack.

Hashirama's eyes shone in excitement. "Three chakra-natures? That's impressive! Do they rely on your differing chakra-pools? I have never seen anything like that!" His gaze flicked back to Madara, despite his words. Seeing the Uchiha battle from the side-lines allowed him to truly admire the elegance and fluidity he excelled in. It was no wonder, the Uchiha referred to his fights as dances… every single movement was eye-catching, making him wish to just cut in with the foreign shinobi and be the one to dance with the raven, to have his undivided attention…

He was jealous of a stranger. Kami, have mercy on his soul.

Finally, Madara leaped back into the middle of the training ground, making no further move to continue his testing.

"You are strong." A rare compliment; Hashirama couldn't even remember ever receiving it… Madara was probably more likely to insult him than anything else. Or had always attempted to ignore him on a personal level during their actual battles.

"He passed the test, I guess", Hashirama concluded cheerily, turning back at the stranger. "Well, you probably won't be surprised that I cannot leave you unsupervised until we've settled things. But if you wish to, I will welcome you to Konohagakure as the village's Hokage as long as you won't attempt harming our people."

For a moment, the man simply watched Hashirama out of his striking, two-coloured eyes, and the Senju had no idea about what might be going through his head. “Kakuzu”, he finally introduced, making the Hokage smile broadly. “Kakuzu, then.”

“So, let me get this straight. Takigakure sent an assassin after you.”

“They did.”

“And he outed himself.”

“Yeah.”

“And then you invited him to the village.”

“And he accepted!” Well, at least that was how he had interpreted the masked man’s course of action. Tobirama’s motives left way less to ponder about; he could see a vein throb on his little brother’s forehead. “Give me a reason”, the white-haired shinobi demanded, “A single one, to not tear your brain right out of your skull and squash it under my shoe.”

Oh, Tobirama was mad… but why? He had not only managed to avoid getting killed, he even had gathered a new ally! Currently, Madara accompanied him, to make sure Kakuzu wasn’t up to anything, which was a feat on its own, since the Uchiha usually despised unfamiliar people… well, familiar ones, too, sometimes, but that wasn’t what this was about.

“He didn’t have a proper meal in weeks, can you imagine? And he refused to take off his mask in front of us, but… He’s a medical enigma! I have never met a person able to host three differing chakra-pools, in order to cast three elements! I am also fairly certain his body is modified otherwise, too, but I cannot be certain.” Hashirama’s eyes shone with excitement. He hoped, things would work out between them; he didn’t want to order the man back to his old village, probably to be killed due to not assassinating the Hokage. He would find a way to deal with the fallout.

Of course, he had heard rumours about other villages being raised, but he had never worried about them; quite the opposite, actually. He had been happy clans in other countries had stopped their blood feuds, too. But the knowledge they wished him gone, that they viewed Konoha as a threat to be erased, made his stomach churn. He was able to take care of himself -despite his humble nature, he was very aware there was nobody able to truly harm him aside from Madara… and the Uchiha leader would rather commit Seppuku than turn against him.

However; due to this occurrence, he had realised it wouldn’t do to just ignore the founding of other villages and their mixed feelings towards each other. He refused to have called an ending to one war, only to start another; this wasn’t what he and Madara had been striving after.

“I will send notice to the other villages. I wish to meet up with their leaders. Nothing good will emerge the current path we take”, he deemed; unhappy, but hoping to change tides. It wasn’t too late, they were new to this way of life, all of them. If they erased prejudice and

hate, they could still live peacefully with each other. “If I meet up with them, I might convince them to leave this foolish track.”

“And if they don’t?”

Hashirama looked up the meet Madara’s gaze; the Uchiha had just arrived, probably after introducing Izuna to the new village member and leaving his younger brother to supervise him for the time being.

The Hokage didn’t let himself get fazed by the raven’s question; eyes determined. “They will.”

Madara held his gaze for a moment more, before nodding. “We’ll use my birds to deliver your letters; this way we can be certain they arrive.”

“Will you accompany me to the meeting, should they agree?”, the older Senju asked, shoulders sagging a little in relief at Madara’s simple answer of “Yes.”

“Thank you, love.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, fuckers!

Kakuzu is my favourite character right after Madara... before Madara's introduction, he was my favourite. I'll never get over the stupid way he was killed for plot just because apparently Kishimoto couldn't come up with a decent idea so he just had Naruto throwing around his super-new Rasengan.
Guess who therefore had a Hayday writing this part, even though I didn't find any time in weeks...
I won't be able to answer all of the comments today, I fear, but I will do so! Thank you SO very much!

Happy New Year to wherever you are around the globe! Don't burn too much fireworks; it's bad for the environment and your bank account.

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Which includes way too many emotions for one chapter, but somehow this just happened.

Chapter Notes

I'm scared as fuck.
On february 8th, I'll be writing an exam in Controlling and I never had anything to do with management studies before, suck at math and am so much better in anything else than that. I've been basically learning all semester long for this and at this point, I'm pretty much freaking out.
So, yeah... I'm really sorry this took so long <.<

Anyway: Thank you so much for all your loving comments, they're really keeping me on writing, at this point :)

“Byakuren agreed!”

Madara didn’t look up from the table as Hashirama dashed into his kitchen. He had skipped breakfast and had no intention of repeating that particular mistake. Instead, he popped a piece of fried fish into his mouth.

It was due to Kakuzu, that they had been able to locate the newly formed villages and name their leaders -their Kage. While Konohagakure had been busy with itself (especially their leaders; one of whom refused to be one and the other one who didn’t want to be, either), clans in other countries had formed villages, as well, named leaders, forged alliances. The smaller countries had kept a close eye on that; concerned with the sudden shift of power. And due to their latest addition of a rogue assassin, the Hokage and his first advisor were now ridden of their former ignorance.

“The Mizukage, huh”, Madara answered, taking another piece of his lunch. Since Water-Country had capsuled itself off from the outside world for years, even Kakuzu didn’t know much more of him than his name. It had been more than a week since Hashirama had sent the letters and each of the four birds had returned without their small scrolls. Originally, the Hokage had prepared an invitation to Takigakure, as well, in hopes of coming clear with the village’s leaders, however; Kakuzu had made it very clear he wasn’t thrilled with that. He had

cut all ties with Takigakure and no desire to ever return to a village that had basically forced him on a suicide-mission. Thus, Hashirama had refrained from sending another invitation.

“Three more to go”, Madara noted. They had been very careful wording the circumstances of what they had officially named The Kage Summit. Hashirama had been the one offering both, date and place for the meeting. It wasn’t too far-fetched if the other Kage suspected treason; an ambush prepared at the place Hashirama had decided on. But if he offered to change the meeting to a location of their choice, every Kage would demand another place and date and chances were high no-one would agree with another at all. Thus, Hashirama had decided to place the Summit in Fire-Country, however; way off the Hidden village. To compensate, he had offered for them to arrive as long in advance as they wished to, to convince themselves his intentions were pure.

Furthermore, Madara had instructed him to invite one guard with each Kage, since Hashirama wouldn’t arrive alone, as well.

“So…” Madara looked up from his food when Hashirama spoke up again. “What are we going to do now?”

The Uchiha lifted a slender brow at the Senju’s question, answering slowly as though he was talking to a child. “Now, we will wait for the others to answer.”

Hashirama pouted. That wasn’t what he’d meant, at all.

“Mope around all you want”, Madara declared, setting aside his chopsticks and putting his now empty plate in the sink to wash later -preferably without Hashirama pouting next to him. “But at least try to do so in your own house.”

Hashirama pouted. “Where are you going?”, the nosy fucker asked, making Madara roll his eyes. “The onsen. Now, fuck off.”

The Hokage peeked up as Madara put on his shoes. Visiting the onsen was a pretty good idea… it was shortly after noon, the place wouldn’t be crowded. “I’ll be going with you,” he decided, following the Uchiha outside.

“Don’t you have your own fucking life?”, the raven growled. At this rate, Hashirama had to be considered a pest. Whether it was in the Hokage’s office doing tons of paperwork, visiting the Academy, sparring and now even this. Hashirama just couldn’t leave him alone for one meagre minute, could he? However; he wouldn’t change his plans merely due to that clingy Senju.

By now, Konoha had three onsen but he headed to the one farthest away, since it happened to have the hottest springs. Resolutely ignoring the blabbering Senju next to him, he made his way to changing room.

“Madara-sama. Hokage-sama.” Hashirama had to supress a smile. As the village’s official leader, people made sure to greet him first, however; no member of the Uchiha-clan ever did. Whenever Madara and him were out, every Uchiha would instead greet Madara first, every

single time without failure. He wasn't even certain his sadly-not-lover actually noticed but Hashirama certainly did.

He recognised the two Uchiha who were just about to leave as Makatoro and Ninari, a married couple who had gotten rather close to the Yamanaka, often taking part in their studies of the mind; offering new perspectives considering their Sharingan. "I'm sorry for the inconvenience, Madara-sama, but might you spare a minute? The latest cerebral-analysis has been rather unexpected and since you asked to be kept up to date…"

Madara, apparently knowing what this was about, gave a nod. "Go ahead", he told Hashirama. "I'll just need a few minutes."

The Hokage nodded, before entering the changing room, swiftly unclothing and making his way to the showers. After cleaning himself, he grabbed a towel and finally lowered into the steaming water of the onsen next door. Apparently, Madara and him were the only visitors for the moment, he noted; the place was empty. But then, most non-Uchiha tended to prefer the other onsen, which weren't quite as hot.

The door opened and Hashirama looked up. Madara had been right, it had really only taken a few minutes to- he swallowed. Pale skin stretched above lean, wiry muscle, still wet from the shower he had taken before entering. Raven hair was plastered over his back and shoulders and Hashirama couldn't help but notice how much smaller the Uchiha seemed without the utter volume of hair. Nearly… delicate. Oh, Madara would beat the living shit out of him if Hashirama ever told him but it was so very true and the Hokage swallowed once more as he felt a wave of protectiveness rushing over him. The pure urge to keep away all harm, to make sure Madara, who had suffered the most out of all of them, would never have to hurt anymore.

Without noticing Hashirama's train of thought (because otherwise, a certain someone would have gotten beaten up), Madara put his towel on the small table next to Hashirama's, before making his way to the onsen, swiftly lowering himself into the hot water. He closed his eyes, apparently not noticing the small sigh escaping his lips.

Hashirama smiled. There were very few people, Madara would allow himself to lower his guard around. The only other one he could think of was Izuna and the pride he felt blooming in his chest at that thought warmed even more than the hot water.

A dry cough interrupted the comfortable silence and Hashirama's gaze darkened a little at the sound. Once a week, he treated Madara's lungs, got rid of the mucus that clung to the mutilated tissue and made sure to prevent potential infections. However; he had yet to figure out how to treat the actual cause for the Uchiha's poor health condition and some of his symptoms still lingered. His slender stature was one of those, since Madara's system was unable to synthetize at full capacity, making it hard for him to gain weight. Truly amazing was the way his system, especially his lungs had adapted to the limited oxygen-transmission. He reached out, carefully wrapping his arm around the Uchiha's waist.

"What-" Madara's indignant complain was cut off as he was lifted onto the Hokage's lap, one hand carefully spread on his chest, seeping medical chakra into his lungs, the other on his waist. "The fuck do you think you're doing?", the raven snapped, making Hashirama chuckle

in his ear. “The usual”, he told Madara, making him hiss at him and Hashirama couldn’t help but be reminded of an angry cat. “Fuck off or I’ll-” The raven spluttered as Hashirama brushed his wet hair aside, pressing a tender kiss at the Uchiha’s neck. “I love you”, he murmured, tightening his hold ever so slightly. “So much.”

Madara swallowed. “Stop it.”

“You’re so stubborn”, the Senju whispered, bushing another kiss at the pale neck. But ah, would he love Madara just as much if he wasn’t that stubborn, beautiful man? He chuckled. No. Never. Just Madara. How very fortunate, he himself could be stubborn, too.

“Stop it, or I will nail your balls on a mantelshelf”, the Uchiha growled, finally starting to gain his wits back. “Whatever you say, love”, Hashirama chuckled, breath tickling his ear. However; instead of finally letting him go, the Senju swiftly switched Madara’s position on his lap, making the raven face him, before a warm mouth captured his own. A large hand found his back, pressing him even closer to Hashirama’s broad chest, the other cradled his neck, making him exhale shakenly. Hashirama was warm, even with the hot water surrounding them, the heat radiating into his very core.

His lids lowered, until his eyes finally closed and somehow, he felt his arms wrapping around the Senju’s larger frame, fingers clawing into thick, brown strands of hair. The palm on his back pressed him even closer, and his lips opened, allowing a hot tongue to invade his mouth as Hashirama’s kiss got more heated, his fingers tangling deeper into Hashirama’s wet hair, making him groan into Hashirama’s mouth.

He didn’t know how much time passed between the clash of lips, breath and tongue, however; at some point the need to breathe became overwhelming and he ripped himself from Hashirama’s mouth, only to have the Senju cradle him close to his chest, tucking his head to his shoulder and kissing the top of it while Madara took some time to calm his flying breaths.

Minutes passed, who cared about how many, as they both calmed before finally, Madara huffed. “Now let me get down from here, stupid blockhead. Your cock is poking my ass.”

Loving Madara was eerily similar to dancing on a volcano, Hashirama thought. Utterly unpredictable, burning hot, maybe even a little masochistic, but never boring.

He loved every single moment of it.

“We have confirmations of Mizukage Byakuren and Raikage A, as well as Tsuchikage Ishikawa. Reto the Kazekage is the only one who failed to rely so far”, Tobirama summarised. The five of them had gathered in the Hokage’s office, going over what little information they had at this point. On the other side of the table, Kakuzu leaned back in his chair. It had been three weeks since he had taken on the Hokage’s offer and became a citizen of Konohagakure and even though he was reluctant about making rash decisions, he had yet to regret this one.

Senju Hashirama, the great Kami no Shinobi, was a man simultaneously unworthy and mostly dignified for his title. His battle-power was unmatched, there was no end to the amount of chakra he was able to draw from and his jutsu were unmatched by anyone but Uchiha Madara (whom he was very obviously in love with but that wasn't his business). However; at the very same time he had never met a man who came even close to the Hokage's level as a do-gooder. His believes and ambitions were great, maybe too much so for the world they lived in. He would have to be careful not to drown in reality.

"Any ideas about the Kazekage, Kuzu?"

The assassin growled, the sound not in the slightest muffled by his mask. "Don't call me that." Izuna grinned. Kakuzu was one cold-blooded son of a bitch; however, he had made it his personal mission to fuck that attitude up. But since they were at business, he would let it go for now.

"As far as I know, he is extraordinary mighty", the masked man finally went back to business. "However; considering your battle-power, that shouldn't make things difficult." The way he said it, it was obvious he didn't intend the words to be flattering. He merely stated a fact. "Reto is said to be a fierce man, who 'gathered all the desert-dwelling shinobi under his control with his overwhelming power', as far as my sources go. I wouldn't be surprised if he would leave the matter of his arrival unanswered as to not give anything away."

Tobirama wrote down a few notes on the scroll in front of him. "And which sources are we talking about, Kakuzu-san?"

"Sources that would prefer to be none of your business, Tobirama-san", came the predictable reply, making Hashirama laugh at his younger brother. "You should have seen that one coming", he mocked. Kakuzu was a man of many mysteries but as far as he was concerned, the assassin was reliable. He had incredible amounts of inside information, way more than any of them could hope for at this point and he had no idea how he managed to gather even half of it. But Hashirama trusted in him. Kakuzu considered himself a citizen of Konohagakure but his secrets were his alone and he wouldn't sell them, not even to any of them.

"It doesn't matter, anyway", Madara decided. "He will either partake in the Summit, or he will not. In that case, his matters won't be taken into consideration, though."

"Madara", the Hokage cried. "Don't be cruel! Of course, we will-" "You will *not* make amends for a village whose leader doesn't even bother showing up to the Kage Summit", Tobirama snapped, making Hashirama's head slam into the table as a sad cloud rained above him.

"Your Hokage certainly is a picture of dignity and persistence", Kakuzu drawled, making Izuna grin at him. "He's your Hokage, too, now." Oh, joy.

Hashirama and Madara would make their way to the meeting-hall in two days. The place had been specifically built for this event; scheduled time of arrival for all invited parties was noon. Since the place was rather off-roads and quite far from Konoha, they would arrive the

evening before, spend the night not too far from their destination and arrive in time. Izuna and Tobirama would run the village in the meantime.

“This meeting is supposed to ensure peace”, Hashirama mumbled into the wooden table, making Izuna sigh, Madara groan, Kakuzu huff and Tobirama’s forehead throb. “Make sure he won’t fuck this up”, the younger Senju ordered, making Madara cross his arms. “He’s a fucking air-head, but we’ll manage”, he answered, making the Shoudaime pout. “Everyone’s against me”, he moaned, his little cloud raining sadly onto the table. “Even my brother has abandoned me. This is a cruel fate, indeed.”

“Has he always been like… this?”, Kakuzu asked, and everyone was only mildly surprised when instead of Tobirama, Madara answered. “There wasn’t a single meeting in our childhood, he wouldn’t mope around. That very first time was…” Hashirama smiled, sitting up again, his expression soft, as he took over and finished: “… when you told me to fuck off after I wanted to show you how to skip stones.” His eyes clouded, his mind far away in distant memories. “And then, when Itama died… you were the one to rip me from sadness. I just wanted to be alone, wanted to mourn, but you wouldn’t have any of it. You saved my soul a little, that day, you know?” Even shrouded in melancholia and sadness, the Hokage’s eyes remained soft. “That is why we need to do this… why we need to do everything in our power to make peace flourish. So no child will ever have to lose their brothers, sisters, fathers or mothers. For us… and for those whom the future belongs to.”

He didn’t even seem to notice the silence following his words, until Madara sighed, brushing a strand of raven hair out of his face. “And we will”, he promised. “However; begging will do our case no good. We are in a position of power, Hashirama, if we render it weak, our chances of success will dwindle. We have to play our cards, not throw them at the table for everyone to see and play around with.”

Hashirama nodded. “I’ll leave you to business, then”, he decided, getting up before swiftly leaving the office, making Izuna frown at the sudden exit. What…?

“Leave him be”, Tobirama advised, leaning back in his chair. “Anija needs some time alone right now.” Even after all these years, his brother still mourned Itama and Kuwarama… and sometimes, memories could be overwhelming, even for them.

“You smell of sadness, Ashura”, Two-Tails greeted, making him smile a little.

“A very good afternoon to you, too, Matatabi”, he answered, sitting down and leaning on one of the giant oaks he had created to provide the Bijuu with shadow. Despite all odds, Matatabi had decided to stay. It was merely a few minutes from the village to her place; a giant place him, Madara and even Tobirama had re-structured to her very wishes. The giant trees -and smaller ones in between-, the large river, the stone-plateau she could sunbathe on (apparently, giant flaming cats weren’t too different from normal ones in some regards). On very rare occasions, Matatabi would even visit the village, claiming she wanted to watch “tiny humans at work”. By now, people had gotten rather used to her presence. He even remembered a three-year old asking his mother about the “big kitty-cat” living in the forest once.

“What bothers you, brother?” Matatabi walked up to him, making the ground rumble, before sitting by his side. “If I can be of any help, tell me.”

The Hokage kept quiet for a few minutes, watching the clouds get chased on the sky… it was a rather windy day. “What if it won’t work out?”, he then asked, growing a perfectly shaped little daisy next to him, carefully unearthing it and examining each petal. “What if all this won’t work and the other Kage won’t agree to peace? What if, by founding this village and ending the war between Senju and Uchiha, we simply have started another, even greater one? What if all be have accomplished so far is doomed to failure, in the very end?” The daisy in his palm tiled its head as if to agree with its master’s sadness. Soothingly, he caressed the petals, making it raise a little once more.

“Back then”, Matatabi started, making him smile a little. Ah, a story of Ashura and Indra was it, again. Even though Madara claimed it foolish and he himself had no memories to the man the Bijuu considered their brother, he couldn’t help but feel a little related to Ōtsutsuki Ashura after all of this. His life ended in tragedy, though, and he dearly hoped history wouldn’t be meant to repeat itself.

“Father chose you as his successor, since he didn’t believe in Indra’s way of ensuring peace through power. As you well know, this ultimately ended in Indra’s death and your… withdrawal from us. However, we… I… never intended to tell you…” Nibi was strangely silent for a moment, before going on, her two-coloured eyes firmly hefted somewhere in the distance. “You searched me out, one last time”, she continued, the words obviously painful. “You told me the villagers… your people… wouldn’t want to have anything to do with us, since… since we were so close to Indra, Kurama in particular. You bowed to their wishes because you wanted to ensure peace… that night, you didn’t even say Goodbye.” Hashirama didn’t know whether Bijuu could cry. But Matatabi looked like she was biting back her tears, at this point. “All I am saying, is… That sometimes, giving in to the demands of many will only make those who stay behind lose everything.”

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

First half: Lots of talk necessary.
Second half: No talk necessary.

Chapter Notes

It's dead a clock at night, I'm totally done with myself and my stupid decision to finish this before I go to sleep but as it turned out this is the longest chapter so far... therefore, I'll answer your comments tomorrow - I didn't forget, I promise!
Also: 1.000 Kudos! Guys, I don't even... thank you SO MUCH!

Spoiler:
There's a rating for a reason.
If you don't want to know why, I advise you to just skip the second half of this chapter.
Not the first, though. Because plot.

Hashirama's Kage-robes swished slightly as he bowed his head. "It is a pleasure finally meeting you, my fellow Kage. I hope your journey was pleasant."

On the pentagonal table in the middle of the round room, five men had taken their place, each of them one guard behind them, shielding their backs with their own lives. Even the Kazekage had arrived! Kakuzu probably had been right, he had decided to refrain from sending a reply to his letter as to not give himself away.

"This is indeed a unique setting you have created", the Raikage, a man of even darker skin than the Hokage, answered, as Hashirama straightened himself again, his hair neatly lowering back to its place. "I am not going to pretend that invitation of yours didn't surprise our Hidden Village."

The Mizukage nodded, the notion seemed strange due to his one slow eye. Hashirama had to bite back the offer to take a look at it since he deemed it treatable from his place. However; Madara would probably not be too pleased about that. "As it did us", Byakuren agreed and Hashirama noticed his sharp teeth with interest. "However; even though Kirigakure is far off your shores, we have great interest in this idea of a meeting."

"Ah!" Hashirama looked around, meeting each Kage's eyes. "But why is that? Shouldn't it be the opposite; the leaders of the strongest villages meeting to ensure peace considered a matter

of course?" He straightened himself a little more. "Konohagakure was raised out of the ashes of an everlasting war; a war that brought nothing but death, desperation and hate… and it is my greatest wish to ensure such never repeats, least of all between our newly raised villages."

The Tsuchikage -who had everyone wondering who was older, him or the Mizukage- leaned slightly back in his chair. "Your words speak of wisdom, Hokage", he deemed. "And I have indeed come to here to endorse the gist of peace. Our world has been at war for so long, it has forgotten the extend of cruelty it contains."

"There is no reason for war between equals", Raikage A agreed. "As it will merely mean none of us will be able to win."

"This a transaction, nothing to get emotional over", the Kazekage finally spoke up, hands folded neatly on the table. "You wish for peace and are willing to pay a price for such. The only matter of discussion is its exact cost."

"Peace is not only the Hokage's wish", the Tsuchikage answered. "Iwagakure has no desire of war, either. We have fought for peace too long to now let it slip between our fingers."

The Mizukage seemed to think similar. "We have gathered as equals and as such we will negotiate", he deemed. "However; we need to be equals in power, too, if we truly wish to prevent conflict in the upcoming future."

Kazekage Reto unfolded his hands. "We have a different wish", he declared, his grey eyes not betraying his emotions on the matter. "Our nation is completely covered in sand and infertile. Thus, we ask the Leaf to share arable land with us. As our temple's disciples have prepared measures to seal the Ichibi, we have no desire for further power."

Hashirama could feel Madara tense behind his back and was very aware he had to act quickly to prevent a fallout. However; before he was able to answer, the Raikage spoke up. "Kazekage! You are dreaming, there are no possibilities of sealing such amounts of chakra."

"And even if you did, you would unbalance the villages", Byakuren answered, a deep frown between his grey eyebrows. "You will only conjure war in the long term over such a source of power."

"For a price, we are willing to share our knowledge with you, thus equalling the nations once more", the Raikage answered, however, before anyone was able to negotiate further on that offer, Hashirama spoke up. "I would prefer you not to."

For a moment, the room echoed in silence, before Ishikawa took word. "What are you referring to?"

"Both", Hashirama answered, his expression earnest. "Kazekage, I ask you to refrain from attempting to seal One-Tails. And if possible, erase any knowledge on that behalf, instead of selling it, no matter the price."

Within seconds, the room's tension spiked, however; the Mizukage calmly turned his attention to him, no sign of anger on his features. "And why would you ask such, Hokage",

he questioned.

“The Uzumaki are famed for their fūinjutsu; I should have known the Hokage would try to capture Bijuu first, using their seals. You are cousins, after all”, Reto growled, making Hashirama raise his hand, focusing attention on himself once more.

“Sealing sentient beings has always been an abhorred technique”, he started calmly, “And we would be wise to remember why even in times of war it was considered such. We are Kage, it is our responsibility to ensure peace… however, without morality it is worth nothing.”

“You are speaking of Bijuu”, the Raikage answered, crossing his arms. “If it comes down to it, they are raging masses of chakra; destructive and feared if nothing else. You are speaking of morality, but isn’t it our duty to ensure our villages won’t be attacked by raging beasts?”

“Hate, once planted, will always fester and grow, until it has swallowed all sense of reason.” Hashirama turned slightly, until he could face Madara who stood slightly behind him at his side. “Senju and Uchiha have hated each other for generations; nobody even remembers the reason for or feud anymore.” With the exception of nine Tailed Beasts but that wasn’t what this was about, “And yet we slaughtered children, siblings and parents alike. And with each senseless death, our hate grew until we were unable to even imagine a world without it. However; once we were able to cease our fruitless war, a new era rose, prospering with hope and possibilities none of us even dreamed of before.” He opened his arms in an embracing gesture. “The only way to truly establish peace is understanding. If we solely remain on views whose origin we cannot even remember anymore, we will always be caught in an everlasting spiral or hatred.” He turned to the Kazekage. “I will gladly make your lands flourish in exchange for the destruction of your sealing-techniques and your vow for them to remain forgotten.”

Reto’s grey eyes rested solely on Hashirama now, his elbows resting on his table, hands folded once more under his chin. “And if I refuse?”

“Then the Hidden Village of the Sand will come to fear *my* rage, because I will annihilate every single spec of it and *burn it to the ground*.” Madara’s voice didn’t even raise as he spoke, leaving no doubt about his ability to carry out his threat. “And its ashes will be forever buried under the dead sands of your barren land.” Sharingan glowing in the shadows of his hair, Madara hadn’t even moved, still standing straight at Hashirama’s side.

“You dare threatening my village?”, the Kazekage asked, his grey eyes darkening. However; before either, Hashirama or Madara were able to answer, the Tsuchikage interrupted, his voice cutting the tense air with a kunai’s sharpness. “After your fight with the Nine-Tails I would have expected you to be the last one to disagree with this.”

Madara didn’t even ask where that information hailed from, his focus remaining on the Kazekage as he answered. “Kurama attacked Konohagakure, that much is true”, he confirmed. “And to protect the village, I defeated him. However; Kurama at the time was not at his senses but forced to act on the commands of two shinobi whose origin I do not know - and probably will never since I killed them.”

“I assume when talking of someone named Kurama, you are referring to the Kyuubi”, Byakuren mused, making Madara’s head turn slightly to meet his gaze. “It turns out, the Bijuu have actual names. They simply never care to tell because they usually are either attacked or fled from.”

The demonic, heartless leader of the Uchiha-clan had a soft spot for Tailed Beasts. Who would have guessed that, the Raikage mused. However; he refrained from telling the Uchiha leader such, instead pointing out: “Lovely as this story might be, it doesn’t offer a solution for the problem at hand.”

Hashirama smiled. “But it does”, he offered and within a single moment, the entire room was flooded with chakra as life itself seemed to seep from the Hokage’s veins. Flowers rose from the ground, roses started to rank at the walls, blooming in rich colours, their scent sweetening the room. The air itself thrummed with life and joy and for a moment, children’s laugher seemed to echo between the living walls as rich, berry-burden twines covered the table, their fruits thick and ripe. The Hokage offered his palm, his chakra so potent it seemed to drip between his fingers; spurting even more flowers where it dripped onto the barely recognisable table. A single, five-leaved clover rose from his palm and he carefully planted it right in the middle between them.

“There is no place devoid of life”, he told the Kazekage as his chakra retreated, leaving a room barely recognisable as such. “If it is your demand for peace, I promise you: I will flourish the desert sands as needed, never leaving the people of Sunagakure hungry again. However; I ask of you to step back from your plan of sealing Shukaku… or any Bijuu, for that matter. After ages of war, our greatest desire is peace… between all of us, no matter their origin. I beg of you, my fellow Kage: Help me to make our dreams of peace the most beautiful reality.”

“You are a nuisance.”

“But-“

“No.”

“But Madara-”

“What did we say about begging during the summit?”

“But I-”

“Just shut it, I don’t want to hear it.”

“You threatened to destroy Sunagakure, how is that any better?”

They were heading back to the village. Even though the Kage Summit had worked out differently than they had expected, it *did* work out. They had come to an agreement and each

one of them had signed five copies of the peace declaration every Kage would take back home to their villages.

It was dead night when they arrived, finally stopping their bickering as to not wake everyone along their path, when Hashirama brightened. “Let’s have a drink”, he suggested. “To celebrate.”

Madara rolled his eyes -well the one visible at least. First of all, no kind of alcohol had any effect at all of Hashirama; his metabolism worked way too fast even if he decided to empty three bottles of sake at once. Second… “At this hour, the bars have already closed.” It was a weekday, after all.

Hashirama’s head drooped a little and Madara didn’t have to face him to know he was pouting. However; a moment later, the Senju smiled. “Let’s head to my place, then”, he offered, having the raven sigh with non-existent patience. “You usually don’t drink and if we grab any of Tobirama’s bottles-” “Your place?”, the Hokage hastily interrupted, making Madara huff. “You’re hopeless.”

When they entered, Madara carefully kneaded the tiniest amount of chakra, before informing Hashirama: “Izuna isn’t home.” Probably plotting with Tobirama again, he noted and couldn’t help the chuckle escaping his lips as he slipped off his sandals. “Who would have guessed these two would be thick as thieves, back then?”

Hashirama smiled, as they made their way to the living room. The place seemed nearly too comfortable for the usually gloomy Uchiha, in a strange way. In the corner opposite of the door leading to a small garden, the tatami mats had been added with cushions and blankets, inviting to settle down and relax. In the middle of the room, a tea-table and even more cushions offered a place to take a break. The largest wall was entirely covered in a shelf stuffed with scrolls in a system that screamed ‘Touch this and die’, reminding him eerily of Tobirama. While Madara made way to another shelf next to them, to grab a bottle of sake and two cups, he settled onto the tatami mats covered with a fluffy blanket, propping up some cushions and making himself comfortable.

When Madara went to sit next to him, Hashirama grabbed his waist and carefully tucked him down between his legs, his back leaning on Hashirama’s chest, before he even got a chance to fill their cups. He was oddly compliant, even leaning into the touch as Hashirama brushed aside his hair and lowered his collar to kiss his neck. Probably because he had already gotten to tell him off all their way back from the Kage Summit, he thought, chuckling slightly and watching the raven shiver at the sensation at his skin. “Can you believe how far we have come?”, he asked. “We have ended an era of war… us, two children with their stupid dreams, meeting at a riverside. We’ve made it possible for children to have a childhood not splattered in war and death. This is our dream and we made it reality.”

“Fuck me.”

Hashirama laughed. “Ah, I got sappy again, didn’t I? I’m sorry, here let me-” “Hashirama.” Madara didn’t turn around to meet his face. “I mean it.”

Two, three, four seconds ticked down until Hashirama understood, truly understood, and then his grip tightened, pulling the Uchiha in his arms even closer. He didn't ask whether Madara was certain, whether he had misunderstood, as such would only disrespect his demand. Within seconds, he had picked the raven up, made way to the upper floor and softly lowered him into his bedsheets (a rather luxury improvement from the futon they had used just up until a few months ago). Moments passed, umber eyes meeting pitch-black ones, before with a soft rustle, most of the Hokage's flashy garb hit the floor. Once at Madara's side he smiled, carefully cupping his cheek. "I love you."

"If you are going to get sappy now, fuck off", Madara snapped and Hashirama chuckled, tenderly kissing his cheek. "No matter what… please, never change", he whispered, the hand not currently caressing the Uchiha's face now loosening the knot on his belt, letting his mantle fall open and revealing the simple fabric of his high-collared shirt, his clan's Uchiwa proudly embroidered onto both sleeves.

He wasn't certain why but watching Madara strip off that special part of clothing -stripping himself of his modesty, his famed Uchiwa, leaving him *bared*- was in a way even more erotic than his actual naked skin underneath. Up this close, Hashirama could make out countless scars painting his pale skin, remembering every single one he had left there himself. Healing scars was more complicated than closing wounds; the flesh had already knitted together, after all, just incorrect. However; Madara wore each of his scars with pride and the only ones noticeable from a distance -a deep slash, bulgingly scared on his left upper arm and a stab-wound on his left thigh- both hailed from Hashirama's katana.

Unsurprisingly, Hashirama's body bore no signs of old wounds. In his childhood, he had gathered scars just like every kid thrown into that mindless war of theirs, however; with his body rising in power, the scars had faded until nothing but soothe skin remained, by now closing every gash before a scar could even start to form.

Hashirama shifted his weight, propping up on his left arm and kissed the Uchiha's pale chest. His lips wandered over cool skin -slightly *too* cool, his inner medical supplied, however; for now he was ignored- before his teeth closed around a rosy nipple, tugging on it and letting his tongue wipe over the sensitive flesh. He watched the nub harden due to its treatment, utterly fascinated by the fact that he was the one to- yelp in surprise as Madara whirled around, steadying himself on his lower arms as he hovered over the Senju; their positions revised. "If you are too distracted to start, I will", he declared, leaning down and swiftly letting his lips travel on Hashirama's tanned chest, tongue following the clearly defined lines of muscle underneath warm skin. He could feel the power radiating right under the warm skin; endless supplies of chakra able to churn whole countries if its wielder wished to. Then his mouth travelled upwards until reaching Hashirama's throat, tugging at the sensitive skin. Would Hashirama survive if he ripped out his throat with his teeth? No, the God of Shinobi would not die of such a minor inconvenience, Madara decided and slightly sank his teeth into the sensitive flesh, before capturing the Senju's lips in a messy, open-mouthed kiss. Hashirama's left hand snuck into his hair, the other wrapping around his waist, leaving him gasping into their kiss as the Hokage once again switched their positions, leaning over him.

The fingers around his waist loosened, now wrapping around Madara's own, as he grinded down his still clothed pelvis, pressing his obvious erection against the raven's own. Madara

moaned into their kiss and the grip in his hair tightened slightly, before Hashirama forced his fingers to stop. By now, the raven had wrapped both arms around him as well, one buried in his hair, pulling at the strands, the other at his back where he could feel Madara's blunt fingernails scratching at his skin. He pulled back, allowing Madara to catch some much needed breaths as he let his lips wander to the junction between his neck and shoulder, licking at the already slightly damp skin… and then sinking his teeth into the offered flesh, sucking a bruising mark that stood out even more in contrast to the pale skin surrounding it. He felt the blood pool under his lips, just underneath Madara's skin, licking the sore area before once more sinking his teeth into the tender skin, deepening the bruise. Madara gasped, his hips lifting on instinct, grinding against Hashirama's and the Senju gripped Madara's last piece of clothing, simply ripping it straight off, finally getting the access he had so long yearned for.

Underneath him, Madara moaned -slightly muffled since Hashirama's tongue had forced its way back into his mouth, fighting for dominance and winning the battle. Hashirama felt his own remaining clothes being ripped to shreds -Tobirama would be mad, he thought absently; he didn't have that many official regalia- before Madara's fingers duck into his buttocks, pressing their bodies together and making both of them groan at the contact. His eyes were half-lidden, nearly dazed and Hashirama couldn't help but stare at his kiss-swollen lips, wet with a mix of salvia and so very tempting. If he ever would be granted a last wish before death, this would be it, he thought dimly. This sight of the so very proud Uchiha, utterly defenceless and trusting, proof of his commitment marked right into his skin… the most beautiful man he had ever been.

His palms wandered down on Madara's back -over numerous smaller scars hailing from attacks of enemies too cowardly to face him directly in battle- until he had reached his final goal, fingertips slightly brushing the small opening.

Underneath him, Madara tensed, making Hashirama shift his attention to his lips once more, plundering the mouth able to form both, all-annihilating katon-jutsu and equally burning insults. When he retreated, the raven underneath him, too proud to draw back first, gasped for air. His fingers had tightly woven into Hashirama's umber strands of hair… and then his back arched unbiddenly, as Hashirama's finger slipped inside him, its path eased with soothing chakra. Head thrown back as he bit his lips, he presented his pale throat, making the Hokage force another mark onto his skin, right at the other side of his neck.

A second finger slipped inside, and blooming vines emerged from the bedposts, wrapping around the Uchiha's arched back, supporting his position while Hashirama's mouth caressed his chest once more, leaving vines decorating his path, tightening around the Uchiha's chest.

The third finger left Madara gasping, making Hashirama's chakra soothe his muscles, relaxing them to be able to take the additional digit. By now, the Hokage himself was breathing harsh as well, grinding his erection against Madara's and making him moan hoarsely as the motion pressed the invading fingers deeply into his core.

"Hashirama-" Knowing what he was about to demand (and since both of their mouths were preoccupied right now, making talking rather limited) he slipped his fingers out of Madara, using his now freed hand to push himself up some more to- "Beautiful." The word had

slipped past his lips before he could even think of its consequences but no matter what, he would never be able to take it back. Underneath him, Madara was a mess of raven hair and creamy, slightly sweaty skin, his usually pale cheeks flushed. His body was solely kept upright by Hashirama's Mokuton, breathing hard and utterly relying on the vines wrapping around him, one of which had wrapped around his left nipple, teasing the small nub maybe the slightest bit too harsh.

Even though his eyes lacked an all-seeing Sharingan at their disposal, Hashirama was certain this was a sight he wouldn't forget until his dying breath.

He grabbed Madara's hands with his own, pinning them at both sides of his head, before in a single swift thrust entering the Uchiha's body.

The raven tensed at the sudden penetration; way larger than the three fingers that had prepared him, needing a moment to take him in. Then, his eyes closed half-way and his fingers tightened their grip around Hashirama's. "Move", he ordered, making the Senju chuckle slightly before entering all the way to the hilt, perfectly filling every single spec of space Madara was able to offer, making his head droop back, raven hair spilling on the sheets and another vine wrapping around his throat, making Madara moan deeply.

Then, Hashirama retreated until he had nearly left that hot, tight place, before re-entering, establishing a steady rhythm. Underneath him, Madara writhed in the unyielding hold of green vines, however; neither them nor Hashirama eased their grip. Instead, Hashirama licked small droplets of sweat from his throat, before messily kissing the Uchiha leader once more, quickening his path inside him and swallowing the gasps he earned.

The change of angle had Madara moan deeply and without asking, Hashirama was aware he had just located his sweet spot, making him hit the place twice more and be rewarded with the sweetest sounds hailing from the depth of Madara's throat, making his body tense underneath him. A single vine wrapped around his cock; its head a deep shade of red by now, caressing it swiftly… until moments later, come splattered their chests at the raven's orgasm. And making him moan in deep satisfaction when only a few thrusts later, he could feel waves of hot seed filling his insides as Hashirama came within him, buried as deeply as possible.

Madara didn't exactly have a lot of experience to compare, however, he was rather certain the fact that Hashirama's length inside him hadn't even softened despite his release was solely rooted (pun not intended) in the Senju's godlike vitality.

"Give me your best, then… Hokage", he rasped, making Hashirama kiss him once more.

"With pleasure."

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

HA HA!

Chapter Notes

Folks, it has only been four days since the last update. I'm scaring myself, here.
Due to the last chapter, luzi22 had questions I've found myself pondering over: "Do the vines count as tentacles? If so would you have to Tag that?"
Do they?
Do I?
I have no fucking idea.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hashirama was a cuddler.

Not that that was in any way surprising, Madara thought, just rather inconvenient. He had woken up due to the unfamiliar closeness, only to find himself drawn at Hashirama's chest, the Senju's arms wound tightly around him, one of his legs tugged between the raven's. There was a vine loosely wrapped around his left ankle, too. His bedroom was an absolute disaster. Plantlife had taken over the walls, thick fluffy moss and beautiful blooming flowers covered the ground and next to his desk, an oak had sprouted.

If Hashirama had ruined his paperwork, he was going to murder him in his sleep.

The window and mirror were burst as well, however; he was rather certain that had been his own doing in a sudden spike of chakra and not Hashirama's. Didn't change the fact that the stupid Senju was responsible for breaking his bedroom window twice, by now.

His body ached pleasantly, thrumming in bone-deep satisfaction and for a moment, he considered letting his eyes slide close once more. However; judging by the sunlight it was already noon and he had way too much to do to sleep even longer. Hashirama, too, for that matter.

But even if he'd decided to give in to weakness, it would have been in vain since a few moments later, the door opened. "Anija, what are you-" Tobirama didn't finish whatever he wanted to know of Hashirama, instead his mouth opened uselessly; eyes fixed on the tangled bodies of his older brother and Madara, who watched him out of half-lidden eyes, both just

barely covered with a soft blanket. At least the disturbance had finally woken Hashirama, who blinked sleepily, carefully brushing strands of raven hair aside to brush a kiss at the Uchiha's cheek, before turning to his younger brother. "What is it, Tobirama?", he asked, getting more awake by the moment.

"Nothing", the younger Senju choked, facing everything in this mess of a room but his brother's eyes. "But you do remember that you-" "That I have a meeting with the Team-leaders today", Hashirama finished, nodding. "Ah, Madara, we should get up; we're going to be late."

"You are not going anywhere before my room is plant-free", the Uchiha informed him, making Hashirama sigh. "But wouldn't it be lovely-" "No."

Madara could *feel* the Hokage's depression-cloud raining over his head and got up before the manifestation of sadness could bother him, too. "Clean up this mess, it's your fault, after all. I need a bath… and where the fuck are my clothes?"

Finally, he spotted a pile of ripped cloth at the fucking ceiling (how did it even get there?!) and huffed, as the left arm of his Susano'o manifested, opening the wardrobe after cutting off the jew tree growing out of it and grabbing a midnight blue kimono, before withdrawing. In a swift movement, he dragged on his clothes, before untangling himself out of the Hokage's grip. "Don't you have shit to do? Tidy up this mess and then fuck off; I have a meeting to attend to. And don't forget that visit to the Academy you scheduled for the afternoon, it was your idea to get in touch with the kids, after all."

Without even bothering to turn around, Madara made his way to the bathroom next door before daring to glance at the clock. Damn, it was even later than he'd expected but there was no way to leave like… this. He was covered in dried sweat, amongst dubious amounts of dried come in places he really wasn't too keen about… and his hair was ridiculous.

Kami, what had that stupid Senju *done* to him?!

He quickly rinsed himself, washing off the remains of last night, before rubbing what felt like half of his remaining soap into his hair. By now, his fingers tangled into the knots and curls, and he grabbed his brush to get at least the worst of it under control, admitting failure shortly after. Curse Hashirama and that soft, tame hair of his, he decided, before carelessly dragging his kimono back on and making his way back to his bedroom. By now, the plant-life had retreated (except for a single bouquet of flowers on his bed) and Hashirama had managed to find the remains of his own clothes. "May I?", he asked hopefully when Madara left the bathroom, having the Uchiha nod once, before swiftly wrapping up an obi around his waist and summoning some torridly hot chakra to dry his still dripping wet hair. Tobirama had already left, probably since he didn't want to get involved with his brother's naked ass.

Without bothering to wait for Hashirama, he left the house and made his way to the south-eastern part of the Uchiha compound. A week and a half ago, Hotaka had woken out of coma -after the better part of a year since Madara's Susano'o had crushed him during their… quarrel about the clan leadership.

According to clan law, their fight was over and done with -Hotaka had challenged him, Madara had won. However; during the last year, Konohagakure had started blooming… and its inhabitants had, too. The war between Senju and Uchiha hadn't been forgotten, because how could it, after generations of despair and blood. But as time passed, its shadows had redrawn, remaining solely as the fundament of their shared village, an ever-lasting warning: 'Never again'. No one protected their backs anymore while out on the streets, and Hashirama's leadership had their clans flourish.

However; Hotaka hadn't witnessed any of that and even though he had challenged Madara for his position, he still was clan… still family. And besides, there was no way to just leave him roaming around without risking major conflict with those clans he wasn't even familiar with at this point.

He swiftly knocked at the door and a few seconds later, was offered entrance. "Good afternoon, Madara-sama."

Hotaka had lost his wife in battle years ago, leaving him with his by now adolescent daughter, who had taken care of him during these last months with the help of Tahaku, one of her cousins. Akumi would soon grow to be a beautiful woman, if a bit shy. She had awoken her Sharingan due to the news of her mother's death, if he remembered correctly.

He slipped off his sandals before entering, swiftly making way to the living room. "Hotaka", he greeted the man sitting in the single armchair, however; before he was able to do the same to Tahaku, who was standing at the far away corner, Makoto piped in. "More than a year, but less than another summer. Pay up."

Madara suppressed a groan. Of course, the elders would take part in this meeting, too. That didn't mean he hadn't hoped for the opposite. Ever since they had joined forces with Akiyama and Hibiko, they'd become even more difficult to deal with.

Isuko squinted, examining his clan-head, before taking out a dubious purse and passed it to Makoto. Then, he huffed. "He didn't top, though. Hibiko owes us dinner."

Sarana crossed her arms. "She'd better make it a good one; that Hashirama-brat woke half the village with his chakra."

Madara blinked. Once. Twice. He had never felt to particularly humiliated by his clan's elders, not even before he had taken leadership of the Uchiha. "I can't wait for the day you finally drop dead", he bit out, but all it accomplished was having Makoto cackle at him. "If we had had a choice, we would have during that last pathetic year."

"Just be glad they cannot re-produce", Sarana noted, counting the coins in the purse Makoto had handed over to her.

"Oh, they can." Itsuko took out his pipe, flicking a few sparks into it with a careless gesture. "Just not with each other."

"You disgusting, filthy, vermin of a man." Madara's attention shifted back to Hotaka, who had gotten out of his armchair, teeth grit and hands balled into fists. "I bet you enjoyed taking

it in the ass, didn't you? Would Tajima-sama still be alive, he would mourn not having killed you the day you were born." He stepped closer, unfortunately being taller than Madara, thus being able to look down to him. "I am ashamed having lost to you; not even deserving to be called a man anymore but whore to that disgrace of a shinobi calling himself Hoka*aaargh!*"

From under his bangs, Madara's sole visible eye met his fellow clan-member's gaze. "I do not care what you think of me", he declared, grip tightening around Hotaka's throat, leaving him to claw uselessly at his arm, feet dangling over the ground, his attempt to kick Madara's unarmoured guts in vain as he effortlessly outstepped. "I am your clan-head, no matter how much you might despise me, until the day you manage to defeat me in battle. But you *will* show respect to your Hokage." Then he let go, letting the struggling man meet the ground rather painfully as he didn't get to his feet in time. "If you create unrest amongst the village, I will hold you responsible."

He turned around then, considering this meeting dealt with. Hotaka would learn to integrate himself into Konoha… or face the consequences. Anyway, this meeting had wrapped up way faster than expected, leaving him with enough time to get some of the paperwork following the Kage Summit's peace agreement done, before he had to head to the Academy. Swiftly, he made his way across the village, slowing his steps as five children dashed across the street in front of him, obviously playing a game of tag. An Uchiha, a Senju, two Shimura and… a Nara, willingly indulging in physical activity. Wonders never ceased, he thought wryly.

And then, one of them latched onto his legs -one of the Shimura children-, making him stop in his path and bemusedly watch the small figure, just barely taller than his waist.

"I can still catch you, after I've tagged Dariki", the Senju child called, making the Shimura clinging to him decline. "Nu-hu! Everyone knows Madara-sama protects you; of course he's a safe-pole!"

A safe pole… a place where one couldn't be tagged during the game, Madara remembered. He had had way too little time to play with his brothers, making every second precious… even more so now, that they were gone… all but Izuna. However, it didn't even make sense that- the Shimura boy ran off again, as the Nara girl leaned against his legs instead, gasping for air. "This is… so much worse than I'd thought…", she managed, clutching her chest. "Never going to play tag… ever again." Then, she looked up and smiled, either not noticing or caring about the Uchiha clanhead's blindsided face. "Thank you, Madara-sama", she offered politely and then proceeded to run off, back to their game.

He blinked, before shaking his head, not even noticing the fond eyes of passing villagers resting on him from the sidelines. After a few seconds in rather obvious confusion, he decided to finally get back to waking. Children were strange creatures, after all.

However; he hadn't even made it halfway to the Hokage-Tower, before being interrupted once more. Apparently, fate wasn't too keen to him, today. "Madara-sama!" He turned around, facing a Senju woman. Light-brown hair, soft features… Umaniki? No, that wasn't her name. But it didn't matter anyway, since she started talking as soon as he faced her. "I am so sorry to bother you, Madara-sama… But I am unable to find my daughter. I assumed she had been napping but when I returned, she was nowhere to be seen. She is only four, she cannot be far but even though I am a Sensor -not the best, I'll admit, but still- I cannot seek

her out. By now, my whole family is searching, and I wanted to ask Hokage-sama as soon as he was available…" Which he wasn't, Madara knew. Probably buried under loads of paperwork and crying fat crocodile tears due to having to deal with it alone.

"Do you have any idea where she could have gone?", he asked, making probably-not-Umaniki shake her head. "We've searched everywhere we could think of."

Madara nodded, swiftly steering his chakra to get familiar with the Senju woman's, since it would probably be similar to her missing daughter's. Seeking out children could be difficult since their chakra wasn't fully developed yet, making it easily blur with any surrounding chakra sources. There was a familiar signature in the Yamanaka compound, but that seemed too adult. "Do you have any other children?", he asked, making her nod. "Yes, a son, five years older than her. He's searching, too." Ah, so that was it. He expanded his search, since: "She is not in the village anymore."

Not-Umaniki paled. "But… we told Mimi over and over again not to leave by herself! The forest is too dangerous to a four-year old!" None of them acknowledged the fact that before Madara and Hashirama had taken over clan-leadership, children at that age had been forced into battle for the first time.

"Pay attention; I will signal as soon as I locate her", he ordered, before disappearing in a cloud of dust. He had to bring some distance between himself and the flustering masses of chakra within Konoha if he wanted to be able to search effectively. Nothing within a thirty-mile radius south, neither west… Matatabi's mass of chakra made it difficult to focus on… oh, that kid couldn't be serious, Madara finally realised. He was one of the most skilled Sensors, even further advanced than Tobirama, and the only possibility for him to *not* be able to seek out his target was its chakra being utterly overlapped with another, far greater source. Why hadn't he thought of that before?

He quickly corrected his path, sharply flaring his chakra to make the child's parents attentive and sprinted deeper into the forest.

The kid had to have either managed a rather quick travel or walked at least two or three hours to make it this far… how had no one noticed earlier? If the child wasn't there, it most probably had been killed by some of the forest's creatures, he realised.

Behind him, he could feel two chakra signatures leaving Konohagakure, following his path. They should arrive a few minutes after him and hopefully- "Indra."

Finally, he had reached Matatabi's place, the wonderful glade they all had helped create for the two-tailed Bijuu. "Good afternoon, Matatabi", he greeted. "I'm sorry to disturb you but I am searching for a child."

The Bijuu's voice was soft. "You could never disturb me, Indra. I hope you are feeling well; your and Ashura's chakra wavered rather fiercely this night." Oh, Kami, please don't force him to have the sex-talk with a giant two-tailed cat… however; before he was able to answer, Matatabi had already moved on in their conversation. "This tiny human walked into my home a few minutes ago", she continued, one of her tails flicking towards a giant oak

Hashirama had created and the small figure sitting in front of it. “I told it to keep away from me and it just… sat down and stared at me. Do you wish for me to get rid of it?”

Oh, crap. “No, no”, Madara reassured quickly. “She ran away from home, I’m sure she didn’t have in mind to-” “I wanted to visit the big, pretty kitty-cat.” The Uchiha groaned inwardly, finally facing the lost child. She was rather tiny for her age, with long blond locks, her forest-green yukata now dirty and torn at a sleeve. Her blue eyes were filling with tears. “Mommy always said no, but I don’t think the pretty cat is dangerous. I even”, she hiccupped, “I even brought a snack.” She pulled a piece of dried meat from her pockets.

“I am sorry she bothered you”, Madara apologised, however; by now Matatabi seemed interested in the child she had formerly (to its luck) just ignored. “You think I am pretty, tiny human?”, she asked, making Mimi nod energetically, sitting up a little. “Papa is allergic to cats; the fur makes him sneeze… so I can’t have one. But I thought maybe… if you want to… we could still be friends?”

The Bijuu’s deep rumble shook the forest’s leaves and he could feel the Senju parents arriving at the other side of the glade. “Mimi!”, the woman, whose actual name was Umikari (Madara hadn’t that wrong, not that he knew it), screamed in panic, however; Matatabi didn’t seem to care as she got up from her resting-place, walking a few steps to where the little girl sat next to Madara. “You wish to be… friends… with me, tiny human?”, Two-Tails asked, baring her teeth. “Do you even have any idea who I am?”

Mimi blinked in confusion. “No”, she confessed, looking as though she didn’t even understand why the Nibi would even ask such a question. The little girl got up and with a quick gesture unseen by her, Madara held back her parents who were way over the edge of panic by now. “I am Senju Mimi”, she introduced herself, bowing politely. “Do you want to be my friend?”

The glade was silent for a few heartbeats. Then, another rumble made the trees shudder. “Have you been this tiny, too, brother?”, she asked Madara, who couldn’t help but chuckle slightly. “We all have been, at some point”, he informed, making the Two-Tails hum. Then, she lowered and turned her head a little, as to get a closer look at Mimi.

“You are too tiny to be my friend”, she finally decided, making the little girl’s eyes water. “But you have walked all this way to meet me on your little legs… come back, when you are not as tiny anymore and we will see.”

That had Mimi beam, her small face glowing. “I am going to be five in only…” She had to think about that, “Half a year! Then, I’m going to be much bigger!”

“Did you grow when you turned five?”, Matatabi asked Madara once more and he laughed. “Children grow all the time”, he answered. “Just not as much.”

Matatabi considered that. “Come back, when you are five and we will see”, she then decided, making Mimi beam at her. “I’ll be *so* much bigger, you’ll see!”

“It’s time to go home, then”, Madara muttered, gesturing at Mimi’s parents who still stood around twenty meters away as if nailed to the place. She then noticed them, too, and started

to run towards them, begging them to let her come back right at her birthday. The Uchiha sighed. “Thank you, Matatabi.”

“Anything for you, Indra”, she answered. “But for now, I am going to take a nap while the sun still shines. And one day, you’ll have to show me what you looked like when you were this tiny.”

Madara cursed under his breath. This whole affair had taken way longer than expected and he was far too late to still get some work done in the Tower. A quick flicker of chakra told him Hashirama wasn’t at the tower, either, but on his way to the main-gate, Tobirama and Izuna next to him… and at the gate, a delegation of six unfamiliar chakra-pools waited, apparently for them. He frowned. There was no other meeting he knew of scheduled and they had been supposed to meet up at the Academy ten minutes ago. In a last sprint, he caught up with the Senju brothers and his own.

Izuna raised a brow at him. “Where have you been all afternoon?”, he asked, making his older brother groan. “Don’t ask”, he muttered, and Tobirama frowned at his brother. “Anija, you did remember to-” “Don’t worry, I already have re-scheduled with the Academy for tomorrow”, Hashirama explained happily, making Tobirama’s lips thin. “That’s not what I-” “Who is waiting for us, anyway?”, Madara asked. Due to his funny little trip to Matatabi, he felt slightly out of the loop.

“The Uzumaki”, Hashirama told him happily, making Madara raise his slim brows. The Uzumaki were a strong clan, closely related to the Senju. However; they had little intention to move to Konohagakure, as far as he was aware. Did they change their minds?

“Anija, you really should-” “There they are”, Hashirama exclaimed happily, swiftly walking up to the six waiting Uzumaki. A man, apparently the squad’s leader, and a younger woman stood in the middle, surrounded by four guards.

He wasn’t too certain since Uchiha and Uzumaki had little to do with each other, however; the man might the Kikoru, the Uzumaki-clanhead. At least his formal clothing, age and general aura heavily implied a powerful position. “Hashirama-san”, he greeted and Madara deemed his suspicions confirmed due to the missing honorific.

“Kikoru-san”, the Hokage smiled. “What a beautiful day you have chosen to visit us. What do we owe the pleasure to?”

The Uzumaki-clanhead frowned a little, seemingly taken by surprise at the question. “We are aware Konohagakure is still a raising village, leaving you with little time but lots of pressure”, he answered. “Therefore, we have decided to spare you the effort of travelling all the way to Uzushiogakure. After the foundation of your village, we decided to wait one more year to deal with the fallout, however; now it is time to finally keep our promise. As you well know, Butsuma-san and I agreed on marriage between our first children, to fasten the ties between our clans… therefore we have arrived to finally settle the wedding-bond between you and my precious daughter Mito within the next days.”

Halfway into Kikoru’s speech, Hashirama’s face had drained of colour, leaving him with an unhealthy ashen tan. “Madara, I-”

Crash!

Within the blink of an eye, Hashirama felt himself bursting through three solid houses -which would have been more if his Mokuton hadn’t caught him-, his spleen ruptured due to Madara’s flying kick. However; he didn’t even take time to heal his injury, nor to apologise to Gukishi, whose house he had demolished last. Instead, he sprung back to his feet, rushing back to the main gate.

“Madara”, he called desperately, however; the Uchiha leader was already gone, leaving him alone with Izuna ready to kill him, Tobirama probably willing to do the same, and six thrown off Uzumaki, his to-be-wife amongst them.

His eyes closed in wordless desperation.

Chapter End Notes

So... we have Madara who's a poor bastard, Hashirama who totally forgot he was engaged with all the gay going on, Tobirama who wanted to warn but got ignored like a bitch and Izuna who by now just wants to rip out Hashirama's spleen.

Tag yourself; I'm Team Tobirama.

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

In which Hashirama is a moron and way too kind for his own good until the gay-line is crossed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Give me a reason, Senju", Izuna's voice was calm but it was the sort of calm anger Hashirama knew from experience was the most deadly when it came to Madara… and his little brother wouldn't be too different from that. "A single one why I shouldn't gut you right here and leave your insides for the crows to feed on."

"I forgot." The Hokage didn't even open his eyes. "I swear to everything, I forgot…"

"And what exactly", Kikoru interrupted, "Are we talking about." His voice was calm but Tobirama could easily hear the upcoming irritation. "Let us get inside to solve this", he therefore offered. "The way to Konoha is long and you are probably tired. Let us have tea while discussing matters."

Unfortunately, Hashirama decided to be a fucking idiot once more. "But I… I have to…"

Tobirama started twitching. "Anija, if you-" "Even think about going after my brother, I will fucking *end* you." Izuna glared at his Kage, and even without his Sharingan activated, seemed to burn a hole right through him. "And now excuse me, I have places to be." And with that Izuna bolted off, probably after wherever his older brother had gone.

"I will not speak for you, however; I expected more respect towards the Hokage, even from the Uchiha", Kikoru stated, making Hashirama bristle slightly. Madara *did* respect him! He just had different ways of showing such. However; before he was able to explain his lover's nature to the Uzumaki clanhead, Tobirama interrupted him. "As I said, please let us discuss this inside. The main-gates are no place for talk, are they?"

His brain was wracking havoc but for once proofed unable to come up with a solution. This marriage was settled for years; before he had even turned ten, Hashirama had been purposed to Uzumaki Mito, as she had been to him. Waiting this long to fulfil the promise had only been due to their father's unexpected death on the battlefield, Hashirama taking on the duty as clan-head and his uprooting of its structures, and then the foundation of Konohagakure. But he knew his brother in way nobody else did, probably not even Madara… and Hashirama was a person deeply driven by his heart. Forcing him into an unhappy marriage -especially if he was very obviously in love with someone else- would irreversibly dull that burning flame all of Konoha relied on. And he loved that bastard of an Uchiha. Tobirama should have seen

it coming from miles away, but he had been blinded by the seemingly unwavering fact of his brother marrying into the Uzumaki as it had been planned for way over a decade now. All these little glances, the desperate eyes, loving gestures a little much even for his overly handsy brother clicked into a place they should have weeks… months ago. And this morning, when he involuntary had witnessed the two of them after what he could only suspect was a night spent together after the successful Kage Summit… he had never before seen Hashirama this happy. Not the overly joyful, vocal bouncing his brother usually tended to, but a quiet, content kind of happiness he knew Hashirama wouldn't find anywhere else but with an unruly, bastardy Uchiha only he and his little brother probably ever would truly be able to fully handle.

And Madara? The first precious moments before Hashirama had fully woken up, he had seemed equally happy. His brother's arms had been tightly wound around him -and everyone knew by now he rather avoided being touched if he could help it- and when Hashirama had kissed his cheek, his eyes had closed in absolute contentment, before he had started kicking Hashirama's useless ass. How was he supposed to solve this? How could he expect the Uzumaki to simply accept Hashirama abandoning their agreement like this?

Before he even noticed, they had made it to the Senju compound, his shoes had already been taken off by nothing but muscle memory. Right behind him the Uzumaki followed, his brother last.

He offered way into the spacious living room, taking place at the tatami table.

"I am so sorry." Hashirama spoke up before anyone else could, his voice wavering with sincerity. "I never wanted to embarrass anyone, you at the very last. I just… I…" He swallowed. "When I realised, I loved him, I was overjoyed. Everything made sense, suddenly. All the struggle, all the pain, nothing mattered anymore but him and I…" He shook his head. "When he finally agreed… I just…" Unable to find words fitting for the all-consuming joy and love he felt, Hashirama stopped trying.

"Following your explanation, you are talking about another male", Kikoru assumed, his expression unreadable. "You do realise as the head of the Uzumaki-clan, I cannot accept such."

The Shodaime sighed deeply. "I really am sorry", he offered miserably. "I dishonoured my father's will and I realise I fail our agreement. If there is a way for me to settle this, be assured I will take it. Senju and Uzumaki have always been cousins, after all."

The silence thickened and suddenly, Tobirama realised what this truly was about. The real issue wasn't Hashirama stepping back from his betrothal with Uzumaki Mito, but- "This isn't about the fact you dishonour my daughter or your betrothal to her, Hashirama-san", Kikoru confirmed the younger Senju's concerns. "But about the abhorrent way you did."

Hashirama was truly miserable by now, however; spoke up before Tobirama could intervene… and he still didn't get it, love-spreading fool that he was. "I am aware I should have informed you and if I had only realised, I would have made my way to the Whirlpool personally", he started, making the other clanhead interrupt once more before Tobirama could speak up and at least attempt to soothe. "You spurn my daughter for lying with another

male", he bellowed, patience finally running out, before calming at least his volume as he continued. "Even our forefathers have realised such to be abhorrent and unnatural; least of all due to the impossibility of siring offspring. If you choose to follow such sickening, abnormal paths, I can no longer consider the Senju a clan suitable to ally with under anything but the direst circumstances!"

The Hokage blinked. Once. Twice, as the silence became heavy enough to cut. "I do not understand", he finally confessed with a calm that unsettled Tobirama even though he was unable to name why, specifically. "How can you deem love wrong? Just look what it bloomed into. All of this, all of Konoha… I did it for him." And only now that he voiced it, he realised how very true that statement was. Yes, he had thrown everything in his might into this village. For the sake of war-torn families, children born to battle, the sake of a better future… but most of all, for him. Without Madara, there would have been no Village Hidden in the Leaves, no peace between raging clans. Everything he had done, everything he had achieved… had been for him. "Without Madara, none of this would have been possible."

Kikoru's knuckles turned white from the force of his fingers clenching. "If you have dishonoured my daughter, your father and both of our clans by giving in to your repugnant cravings for that deviant son of Uchiha Tajima-" "Kikoru-san." Hashirama's interruption was calm still, however; Tobirama could feel his chakra coiling, barely being held back from boiling over. "You are talking about the man I treasure more than anything else in this world, with the only exception of Tobirama. I ask of you to respect him with the dignity becoming of a fellow clan-leader."

"If he lets you rut him like a common whore, there is nothing left to-" The walls around them cracked as poisonous flowers rose from the ground, their pollen making it hard to breathe. The walls spurted plants Tobirama had never witnessed before as the maws of mutilated fly-traps opened, revealing snarling teeth dripping with venom. Where the hell did the Uchiha run off that one time he was actually needed in any kind of political conversation, Tobirama thought. "Anija." His hand lowered on his brother's shoulder in a gesture both, comforting and restraining, forcing himself to reach through the burst of violet chakra. "Calm yourself; this is no suitable behaviour." Physical contact made the feeling of raging chakra right underneath bis brother's surface even more burning.

"I am not going to marry you."

It was Mito who finally spoke up, her hands clasped on the table in perfect composure, seemingly uncaring upon the murderous nature and lashing chakra surrounding them. "There is no love between us, Hashirama-san", she stated calmly. "And we have never even met each other in person prior to today. However; I refuse to be married to an unwilling spouse, just as I refuse to force someone clearly in love with another into marriage."

Hashirama blinked as his raging chakra calmed; the manifestations of his anger retreating into the walls and floor. "I am really sorry, Mito-san", he apologised once more. "Under any other circumstances…"

Mito nodded, understanding what he left unsaid. Under any other circumstances, Hashirama would have held on their betrothal, no matter what and been the best husband he could. "Uzumaki and Senju have always been related and in these times of upheaval, it is more

important than ever we stay close.” Still in perfect composure, she watched the man who had seconds ago wracked havoc within his own living room. “With your consent, I will move to Konohagakure as to fasten the wavering ties between our clans in these difficult times.”

Unfortunately, her father seemed rather opposed to that idea. “I won’t allow-”, he started, however; was interrupted by Hashirama who beamed at his wouldn’t-be-bride. “Konoha is a place for all those who wish to overcome hatred and start a new era of peace”, he exclaimed. “I would be overjoyed to welcome you, if you can forgive our unfortunate first meeting.”

“I will not leave my daughter behind to build bridges to a clan better off forgotten”, Kikoru growled, finally forcing Tobirama to speak up. “Senju and Uzumaki have always stood with each other in times of need and this is how you choose to repay our mutual loyalty?”, he demanded. “This is unbecoming of you; our father always cherished our bond with the Whirlpool.”

“Your father would personally banish your brother’s perverse-” “That is quite enough, I think”, Tobirama interrupted. Hashirama would speak up on behalf of everyone else, be it Uchiha, Senju, Konoha, allies or enemies. But himself, he would never even consider defending. “If Mito-san wishes to continue her life within this village, she is very welcome to.” Couldn’t be worse than Hashirama inviting his own assassin, anyway.

“If you choose to tie yourself to a man spurning you to follow his perverse cravings, instead of your own clan, I cannot force you to reconsider”, Kikoru deemed. “However; in this case I am forced to consider your place in Uzushiogakure forfeited.”

Hashirama’s face went slack in horror. The Uzumaki clanhead would expel his own daughter? He couldn’t be serious; anger had to be clouding his judgement. “Kikoru-san, please-” “I understand, father”, Mito smoothly cut in, expression not giving away her feelings. “I accept your terms; if the Whirlpool spurns me for wishing to strengthen our ties with Konohagakure, so be it.”

Clothes rustling, Kikoru stood up. “In this case, the Uzumaki will take their leave now”, he commanded and within moments, the only redhead staying behind was Mito, who hadn’t even moved an inch. “Mito-san”, Hashirama started, face twisted in sheer disbelief. Tobirama felt his forehead twitch. “You just wanted to get out of Uzushio, didn’t you”, the younger Senju accused.

“You bet I did, Tobirama-san.”

“Your Hokage is an absolute failure.”

“No arguments against that”, Izuna growled, making Tobirama groan. “Is this the Shogi-club of bitching elders, now?”

A pair of piercing green eyes watched him; brows raised even though the rest of his face was covered underneath the mask he never seemed to take off. “I offered to postpone to tomorrow, but you disagreed.”

“Aniki needs some time alone now; I guess he’s currently burning down half the forest”, Izuna grumbled, crossing his arms. “I’ve never seen him this angry before.”

“And if I have to listen to one more minute of him whining, I’ll personally cut Anija’s vocal cords”, Tobirama answered. Mito had asked for a place to stay the night in order to gather her thoughts and he had happily obliged; offering to draw a house for her from the ground. However; since this would be mostly barren, she had preferred a spacious, completely furnished room in one of the buildings prepared for delegates of clans interested in joining the village for the night. They would meet up again tomorrow but for now, things were settled.

Which meant all three of them had been able to meet up tonight as usual.

At the start of it, it had only been Tobirama and Izuna who had met up during the matter of Madara’s refusal to partake in the elections for their village’s leadership. Then, they had continued to discuss the matters of the Uchiha brothers’ new eyes. Discussing had led to further questions, had led to experiments that in the results brought forth even more discussion. And well… when Madara had dumped responsibility for Kakuzu on him, it had turned out the grumpy assassin was just as happy about experimenting with the limits of his own body. And now, the three of them met sometimes once, sometimes twice a week in that awesome lab of Tobirama’s right underneath the Hokage tower. The results of their experiments, their theories and a bunch of scrolls were kept rigorously complicated sealed within that very same room.

Kakuzu set aside the paper with bounties he had studied. “If at any time in the upcoming future, an Uchiha falls in battle, I would try replacing my Katon-source”, he mused. “This one doesn’t hold a candle on the strength Uchiha-chakra is able to muster. Probably since Katon-nature within the Uchiha tends to heat up chakra further.”

“I’d offer mine but I kind of need it”, Izuna answered wryly. “But there are a few who certainly wouldn’t be opposed… I’ll try talking to them; it’s their decision, after all. But for now, we don’t have any upcoming deaths scheduled.”

Tobirama rolled his eyes, before setting a bunch of scrolls on the white desk. “Any new developments?”, he asked, finally getting to topic and making Izuna shake his head. “The time-span remains; forty-seven seconds is the absolute maximum. But since I am able to handle it without incidents, I want to try something else today.”

The Senju frowned, getting what the Uchiha referred to. “There’s no guarantee this will work… and we have no idea about the consequences, should you fail.”

“That is why we have experimented with mice the last time”, Kakuzu cut in. “And everything went smoothly.”

“I won’t go full”, Izuna added. “Thirty should be enough.” Better be safe than sorry; after all, this was a first. They had progressed during the last weeks but since none of them had any experience with these newly developed eyes, they had always carefully monitored any steps taken.

Tobirama scribbled some notes on his scroll -dates, goals, assumptions- before he nodded. “If you are certain, get ready on three”, he answered and within a blink, blood-red eyes glowed at him, the Eternal pattern swirling within. “Three”, Izuna counted down, “Two…” “One”, Tobirama took over and without a single sound, Izuna vanished from existence, leaving only Kakuzu and him. He immediately started scribbling while Kakuzu monitored the room.

“Let’s hope this works out”, the Senju muttered, making Kakuzu huff. “For someone so prone to experimenting, you surely are fraidy-cat when it comes to others doing the same”, he mocked. “Twelve seconds to go.”

“Easy for you to say; it won’t be your throat being ripped out if something goes wrong”, Tobirama shot back. There was a reason neither of their older brothers knew what they were up to. If this worked out, the results would be… incredible, for the lack of another word. “Five… four… three… two… one-” Just as soundlessly, Izuna reappeared -perched right at Tobirama’s desk. “Now, isn’t that awesome”, he grinned, making Kakuzu look actually impressed. “You can move?”

Izuna nodded. “I don’t know within what range, though”, he answered, toying with one of Tobirama’s brushes. The Senju scribbled down quickly once more, already having filled scrolls with the outcome of their experiments. “So much for the impossibility of time travel”, Kakuzu noted and Tobirama couldn’t help but roll his eyes. That didn’t change the fact though, that whatever there was about these advanced Sharingan was apparently able to bend the very fabric of time. They had started small, first, when Izuna mentioned a pellicular… feeling, he couldn’t quite describe. They had discussed nothing else for an entire day -since the possibility of losing sight was still hovering above them- but in the end decided to work on it, allowing the strange feeling of… something… to manifest.

That was when the writing-brush Tobirama had held between his fingers had disappeared right out of existence, only to pop up seconds later in nothing but thin air since the hand having held it prior was no longer there.

As it turned out, *that particular feeling* allowed things to simply… skip specific periods of time, only to re-appear later on with no time passed for the object itself. Izuna called it time-travel since that was way easier but Tobirama wasn’t as certain. They had experimented with hourglasses and the result had shown that the skipped time had absolutely no effect on the object since the sand within hadn’t been moving during its absence.

Kakuzu called it time-travel, too, and Tobirama had decided to ignore him since the opinion of rogue assassins wasn’t worth quite that much.

However; Izuna had a very specific time-window to operate with. Forty-seven seconds of reality was the most he could skip before whatever object he used would either never show up again or wouldn’t even disappear in the first place. Everything more than forty seconds made Izuna’s eyes sting painfully; the sclera turning red and enflamed.

Today, however, had been a novum. To be able to not only catapult objects or mice (which would always appear at the same spot they had left) was a step into an even greater direction. If they would somehow be able to seal the effect of Izuna’s power, there might be a possibility to multiply it and overcome the time-limit… but even though he was an expert on

seals, he hadn’t come up with a solution so far, since the source of the skips was rooted in Izuna’s eyes itself.

Before Tobirama was able to prod further, Izuna gracefully hopped from his desk, offering his hand to Kakuzu with a mocking bow. “Would you like to run off to a distant future with me, Kuzu-chan?”

“How about I rip off your toes, instead.”

“I should have known… when they right out refused to offer even the slightest protection from their side, I should have known…” The richly clad man steadily walked circles in the extremely spacious room, hands clasped behind his back.

“I am deeply sorry I was unable to bring my warning earlier… but they are watching everyone. Nothing escapes these cursed eyes. But now, that they even have corrupted the clan most loyal to you, I couldn’t wait any longer, even at the risk of my own life.”

The man nodded, finally coming to a stop. “And you can be certain: You will be rewarded beyond even your dreams; I won’t forget your unwavering loyalty in the face of uttermost betrayal. And I hope you will advise me further in these difficult times.”

Zetsu bowed deeply, hiding the sharp grin threatening to split his face. “Everything for my daimyo.”

Chapter End Notes

Madara didn't participate in this chapter, because he angry af
He would like to thank you for virtually kicking Hashirama's balls in your comments, though.

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

In which Hashirama tries his best. He really, really does.

Chapter Notes

How are y'all holding up in the face of Corona and cancelled holidays?
I am currently hoarding sixty packages of toilet paper; as soon as my monthly paycheck arrives, I will buy all the tampons, too, and when the world finally succumbs to anarchy, I will be rich beyond my wildest dreams. *sarcasm intensifies*
Until then, though, I'll be writing crappy fanfics.

The Uchiha hated his guts.

Not his Uchiha, mind you. The one who had offered him the greatest gift just two days prior as they had lain together, his arms wrapped around him as he listened to his breaths calm with sleep. It were *the* Uchiha. In general. Like… all of them.

If he didn't know any better, he would've guessed they were at war, still. Except this time, he was the sole focus of their wrath as their eyes seemed to rip him apart piece by piece. And the worst of it? They still utterly adored Tobirama. Ever since his and Madara's little brother had hit off, Tobirama's research considering the Sharingan had developed far beyond expectations, even though both of them refused to share any results.

Long story short: The Uchiha street baker had just offered Tobirama a free sample, then looked straight at Hashirama and turned his back wordlessly.

"They hate me", he bemoaned. "If I can't even get them to forgive me, how can I make Madara?"

Unimpressed, Tobirama took a bite of his free Mochi. It even had a lovely decoration on top, Hashirama noted, his pout saddening. "Use that brain of yours for once and talk to him", his little brother told him, eye twitching. "And at least *try* to avoid demolishing any more buildings. Your current count is eleven and if you finish the dozen, you will pay any repairs yourself."

The Shodaime flinched. He always regrew the parts he was able to, however; was very aware the damage more dire than that. At least he had so far only demolished houses of his own

clan members because the Uchiha wouldn't be as forgiving if- "Madara!" Tobirama started twitching once more as his older brother giddily stared at the Uchiha leader coming their way, probably on his way back from the tower since the paperwork had started piling again. "Please, I-" Out of nothing but thin air, three Uchiha appeared, flanking their clanhead, wordlessly as effectively cutting him from the Hokage's view, until he had passed a corner. Hashirama slumped.

Well, at least he would finally get to talk to Madara after the disaster two days ago, he thought glumly. Due to a very specific request of Mito, Hashirama had scheduled a Head-Gathering; every clan-head as well as one of their advisors were to meet with the Kage and Madara couldn't step aside from that, considering he was both, the Hokage's advisor and Uchiha leader.

The Shimura, Sarutobi, Nara, Yamanaka as well as their newest addition, the Akimichi (who hadn't stayed behind as the Nara had joined since they had always been allied with them and the Yamanaka), were to meet alongside Senju and Uchiha and Hashirama wouldn't let Madara run off again, even at the risk of collateral damage.

Tobirama, frankly spoken, was expecting the worst since he was very up to date due to Izuna's first hand information and just as aware Madara's temper hadn't cooled in the slightest. By now, even the last shinobi (probably even the ramen vendor who had only joined the village last week) were aware his brother had forgotten his own fucking betrothal but so far, only few of them were aware of what, specifically, had happened the night before and he would like to keep it that way, else Hashirama lost all kind of respect in this village.

Since Hashirama had been an airhead even more than usual and just yesterday had mistaken the Academy budget for the Akimichi compound, Kakuzu had stepped in, effectively discharging his Kage from anything even loosely related to money. Hashirama had gladly left the overflowing pile of papers to him and not even a full day later, the masked assassin ruled the budget reports with an iron fist. On the first day, he had declined each and every request, instead doing nothing more than sorting no less than sixteen piles of paper into a system not even Tobirama had fully worked out yet. When Hashirama had returned to grab his coffee cup, he had been told to fuck off, scuffling back to Tobirama with a pout.

That had been at least one ray of hope within this mess and since neither Hashirama, Tobirama, Madara or Izuna were able to stay at the tower, Kakuzu had filled in, in case of emergency.

He was the only one without a clan, Tobirama noted dimly… did he have family back in Takigakure? Most shinobi hailed from a clan, after all… However; before he was able to pounder further about the latest addition to the Kage Tower's leading floor, they had already made it to the meeting room.

They were the first to arrive, however; the others only took a maximum of two minutes more and soon, fourteen represents of Konoha's seven clans, as well as Uzumaki Mito had taken their seats. Hashirama stood from his place, smiling. "Thank you for attending this meeting despite its short notice", he started. "However; this is a decision I will not make without your consent."

Ichigo nodded, carefully watching his Kage. This wasn't the first time Hashirama had scheduled a Head-Gathering. After every single clan's official request to join the village so far, the Shodaime had scheduled a meeting with those clans already part of Konohagakure, asking for their consent first. Until now, no clan head had ever declined, and he silently wondered whether this time might come to be a novum. All of them were very aware, the Hokage had managed to cross Madara-san somehow; leading to the whole Uchiha clan spurning him. However; what exactly happened seemed to be only known to Senju and Uchiha, the first exasperated but somehow unsurprised with their clan-head, the second fiercely loyal to theirs.

Finally, Mito spoke up, her voice quiet but fierce and her expression calm. "I cannot thank Hashirama-san enough for inviting me to become a citizen of this village", she started, before taking a moment to gather her thoughts. "At the age of nine, my father arranged my betrothal with the first son of Senju Butsuma, in order to fasten the ties between our clans. Ever since that day, I have been prepared to fulfil my duty." The present clanheads -with exception of Hashirama and Madara, the Uchiha's face utterly unreadable, blinked. The Hokage was betrothed? He had never spoken of a future wife, instead seemed to spend all his spare time with someone else…

"However", Mito continued, apparently taking great care with her wording, "As time passed, I soon noticed that as every other clan evolved, the Uzumaki stayed behind. We have always been a clan proud of our achievements and history, but the more years passed, the more we were shut off from the outside world, stagnating in a world that ever moving forward, now faster than ever. I did soon come to view Hashirama-san as my escape from the Whirlpool and he indeed offered me a place in Konohagakure, despite the… unfortunate situation." She carefully clasped her hands on the table. "During the last two decades, Uzushiogakure has become a prison more than a home. I was finally able to escape, but the price was exile. But I know there are many in left behind, who wish to leave as well, but have no place to go. Especially now, that my father has officially cut ties with the Senju, the sole clan we always have considered closest to us. If you would be willing… to offer a place for those of us who have nowhere else to go, I promise we will make this village our home and defend it with our lives."

The silence following Mito's words was long, as each of them carefully thought them over. Yes, Ichigo realised. He understood now, why the Hokage had deemed this worthy of a Gathering. If Konohagakure agreed to take in refugees from the Whirlpool, the consequences might be dire, after all.

"In short", Teruki -the Nara-clanhead, easily recognisable due to his partly missing left ear- summed up, "You are asking us to be ready for war with the Whirlpool, in the worst case."

The Sarutobi leader -the only woman amongst the seven of them- shook her head, her pale blue hair somehow not moving an inch. Even Tobirama was impressed with her level of composure. "Uzushiogakure won't declare war, even if Konoha decided to take in refugees. The Uzumaki are mighty, but Kikoru-san won't lead his clan into certain annihilation against six clans at once."

“And how many Uzumaki are we talking about?” Madara was the one to finally speak up, making Hashirama breath out in relief as he actually partook in the conversation. Mito answered without a beat. “Definitely thirty-six. Maybe more, if others choose to follow.”

“Considering that exact number, I assume those wishing to leave have some kind of network”, Tobirama cut in from the sidelines, making Mito nod.

“Few of them have started to meet years ago”, she explained, “But as time passed, the numbers grew. We promised each other; should one find a place safe to stay, they would do everything in their power to make way for the others to leave the Whirlpool, as well. Currently, there are thirty-six Uzumaki desperate to find a new home; all of them for good reasons, I assure you. As far as I am aware, a few children will be coming along their parents but no more than six or seven.”

Madara leaned back in his seat. “To shorten this”, he summed up, “Your father is a dick and you promised those people you would try to get them asylee in Konoha as soon as you moved in.” And wasn’t that something he could relate to…

Hashirama sighed. “Madara, please-” “Eat a cock, I don’t want to hear it”, the Uchiha leader spat, making a big, sad cloud rain over his Kage’s head. “I swear, I never meant to upset you”, the Shodaime promised, only succeeding in having Madara grab his Gunbai, Tomoe spinning. Izuna pinched the bridge of his nose. He had seen this one coming from a mile away but Hashirama just never knew when to shut up. Him and Tobirama shared an equally exasperated and helpless glance with each other.

“You”, Madara started, grip on the battle fan tightening, “You fucking…” He apparently didn’t even know where to start. Oh Kami, this was going to be bad, Izuna decided. “I give in to you and the very next day you tell me you have forgotten being engaged after the Uzumaki arrive at the *fucking main gates?*”, he finally exploded, volume rising with each word. “I let you fuck me”, he then snarled, apparently not even remembering their audience. “Thrice, that very night. I have given everything to you, Hashirama, in pride, body and mind. And you *dare* betraying me like that? How did you expect this to work out? Did you want to keep me as your little addition once you married? Over. My. Dead. Bo-”

Warm lips pressed on his, effectively shutting up his furious monologue. Hashirama’s palm lowered on his fingers, still wrapped around his Gunbai’s handle, caressing the tense knuckles underneath, and with a swift movement, he pulled the Uchiha flush to his chest, keeping him pressed close. Madara snarled at him, attempting to free himself from Hashirama’s embrace, however; heavy vines wrapped around his calves, limiting his movement -at least if he didn’t want to demolish the entire room. Hashirama was very aware that was a pretty likely scenario. He could feel Madara’s free hand painfully scratch the arm he had wrapped around him, to keep him close.

If he had been able to wield his Gunbai, he probably would have used it to bash his Kage all across the place. However; Hashirama was quite aware of one thing: He had the longer breath. Figuratively… and literally. He just needed to be careful with his tongue or might end up with it bitten off, but that didn’t stop him from opening the raven’s mouth, relishing in the taste of warmth and ashes.

He didn't know when, but at some point, the Uchiha's struggles lessened and Hashirama finally pulled back, releasing Madara's lips and letting him gasp for breath, pupils blown wide. "I love you", he murmured, his forehead resting on the raven's. "And I will tell you every day for the rest of my life, no matter if you forgive me or not."

His fingers caressed the Uchiha's pale face and he closed his eyes in joy as Madara let him. He would set this right… no matter what, he would find a way, after all he- wheezed as Madara's Gunbai hit him straight to the face, making him crash right into the wall. The blow had forced a large laceration onto his forehead, making blood run into his eyes before the wound closed. Yes, holding his meeting in a basement had indeed been a good idea from his part, or he would have had just ruined even more houses…

"I will gut you in your sleep", the Uchiha snarled, before taking off, leaving the rest of them behind. Hashirama freed himself from where was stuck to the wall, before taking off after the raven, desperately calling out for him to wait.

Izuna crossed his arms in front of his chest. "Well, all things considered, this could've gone worse", he deemed, making Tobirama huff. "Just be glad you don't have to deal with Hashirama later today", the younger Senju told him, before Izuna turned his attention back to Mito. "Aniki would have outright declined, if he had been truly opposed to your request", he then deemed. "Consider the Uchiha agreeing."

"I don't think I need to tell either of you how happy my brother would be, to have even more Uzumaki consider Konoha their home", Tobirama stated. The rest was up to the other clans, now as their opinions would either settle or change their ultimate decision. Ichigo was the first to speak up, however; chose a different topic. "That at least explains the current situation", the blonde clan-head mused, making the Akimichi leader look at him. "You don't seem surprised", he noted, clearly shaken of what he had just witnessed. Ichigo took a sip from the teacups having been prepared for all of them. "The Yamanaka were the first to join the village", he reminded his fellow clan-leader and friend for many years now. "I always assumed their affair to be the true reason leading to its creation. There is no one able to truly battle each other as many times without one of them ultimately being victorious."

Izuna blinked at that. "Just to be clear, I utterly despised you from the bottom of my heart", he told Tobirama, making him huff. "Sometimes, I still hate your guts", he told the younger Uchiha, making him shrug at Ichigo. "Let's get back to topic", he then advised. "Mito-san may consider Uchiha and Senju agreeing to her request; the rest is up to you. Please remember; this does *not* mean any of you will be forced to make the same choice. All of you are part of Konoha and we won't decide this without your opinion on the matter."

He had waited hundreds of years. Hundreds of years in desperation, hoping that one day, Indra's eyes would return. He could wait just a little more, just be a little more patient. This was too important, one chance in a million, to finally set things right again.

"It is not too late", he told the man in front of him, hiding his face (or rather the lack of one) in the shadows of his large conical hat. "They will not set their plan into motion for some

time yet; they are still gathering allies. We need to be careful; I fear we will only get one chance to defeat them."

"We need to strike before they are ready to", the Daimyo agreed grimly, making his most rusted advisor smirk as he turned his back to pace around the room in circles once more. "But if they are truly that strong -especially united- we need whatever clans we can unite against them."

Zetsu nodded once the Daimyo faced him once more. "My Lord", he offered humbly, "Allow me to tell you of a very interesting heritage Kumogakure keeps so carefully hidden within its dungeons, even its own citizens are unaware…"

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

> Which the author really dislikes because nothing worked out the way she wanted to and now we got a serious case of PTSD.

Chapter Notes

> First things first:
> I'm really glad you view Hashirama's and Madara's relationship the way I do. I never considered either of them taking specific roles, to me they have always been titled "Morons in Love" ever since I started writing this story. I simply was curious about your opinion on that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Madara”, he called. “Madara, wait!”

“Go fuck yourself, Hashirama”, the Uchiha leader spat. “Don’t you dare talking to me, after *that!*” He burned down a bunch of roots Hashirama’s subconsciousness had sent after him in an attempt to slow him down as he made his way across the village.

The Shodaime was starting to get desperate, by now. “But what did I do?”, he asked in despair, gaining some on the Uchiha, but still too far away to get to him.

Apparently, that was what it took to finally make Madara stop, turning on his heel. “You fucking hypocrite”, he bellowed, eyes gleaming with fury, radiating bashing chakra that forced the ground to split under his feet. “You talk of love, of happiness, until I finally let you in, finally trust you, finally lie with you and the day after *your fiancée appears at the main-gate?!*” He seethed with anger now, his chakra heating up until Hashirama could feel the air burning on his face. “And then you dare kiss me with your wife-to-be right in front of us?!”

“But… I called the engagement off as soon as we were home!” Hashirama opened his arms in a helpless gesture. “I cannot send Mito-san back to the Whirlpool, not after what happened! Just…” His voice got quiet, nearly… small. It didn’t fit him, Madara thought. “Just tell me what I can do to fix this. Please…”

The raven frowned at him. “You called off… your engagement?”, he asked in disbelief, making Hashirama cry out. “Of course, I did!” He stepped closer, now, that apparently Madara was willing to listen at least to some extend. “I would never go beyond your back

like that! How could you even think…" *That even for one second I would betray your trust in me, the dream we share, the faith you had in me when you offered me everything, the love I saw in your eyes as we've lain together, the warmth of our bodies in the aftermath, as I listened to your heartbeat?* His features twisted in something not too far from agony. "Had I remembered, I would've written to Kikoru the day I realised I was in love with you! But I just…" He shook his head. "Tobirama managed contacts with the Uzumaki", he continued, face pained. "I never even met Mito-san in person and I just…"

"You really are a nitwit." It sounded nearly resigned, somehow, and Hashirama blinked at the unfamiliar tone. "Do you know why I still gave in to you?", he then asked, leaving the Shodaime puzzled. When it became clear he wouldn't tell, Madara answered his own question. "It is that big, stupid heart of yours", he informed him. "Your empathy and unwavering faith, the ideals you never stray from, even when all hope seems lost." Madara had mocked him for that, still did, but the truth was, Hashirama's heart and unwavering faith were what truly had made this village possible. Hashirama was utterly convinced to believe in the good of people… and in the end, had proven to be right over and over again, even against all odds.

"Are they going to kiss now?" "*Shhhhh!*"

Madara flinched at the sudden interruption, whirling around… and faced at least two dozen of people around them, who watched their Hokage and his advisor with uttermost interest, one of them the boy who had voiced his question. The Uchiha felt his eye twitch. Didn't they have anything better to do?!

However; Hashirama apparently was willing to answer via demonstrating, already stepping forth, making the raven growl at him. "I'm still fucking mad at you and if you even think about it, I'll use you like a ragdoll and tear down your fucking compound."

The Senju slumped, however; a moment later laughed cheerily. Madara would forgive him… It might take him a while to do so, but he would. Everything would be well, in the end. "I love you", he smiled.

"Suck a dick."

When the Uzumaki arrived five days later, Madara stood side by side with him, awaiting the figures clad in black. Mito waited next to them, as well as Konoha's other clanheads.

Within days, the Uzumaki had prepared their leave, sealing all the possessions they were able to into scrolls before they had departed yesterday in the middle of the night, leaving behind nothing but empty houses. As fast as they had been able to with children in tow, they had crossed the border to Fire Country, hastening straight to Konohagakure.

Hashirama opened his arms in a greeting gesture. "Welcome", he called out in joy, as the Uzumaki finally stopped in front of the gates. "Even though the circumstances are unfortunate, we are happy to welcome every single one of you!"

They finally opened their cloaks, revealing striking red hair in dozens of different shades, and a woman stepped forth. “We are more grateful than any of us could put into words, Hokage-sama.”

Hashirama laughed. “Nonsense, nonsense”, he smiled. “We are cousins, aren’t we? So please, call me by my name.” A little boy, no older than five, stepped forth from behind the woman’s legs, making Hashirama go down on one knee. “And who are you, brave one?”, he asked, making the boy puff out his chest as he declared: “I am Daiyoku! And I will be a Fuuinjutsu-master!”

The Shodaime laughed heartily. “You’ll fit right in”, he told the boy. “The only one good with seals around here is Tobirama.”

“Don’t you dare tell him that, his head is already too fu…ll of himself.” Madara crossed his arms, saving his slip in the last second instead of swearing in front of the child. Didn’t change the fact that Tobirama’s head would soon be too fucking big to fit through the doors.

The boy stared at him, his big green eyes a striking contrast to his flaming red, chin-long hair. “Are you an Uchiha?”, he then asked. “A real one?” Without waiting for an answer, he quickly slapped Madara’s leg, before running off to another child; a girl, no more than a year older than him. “I did it”, he yelled. “I touched an Uchiha! Now, you have to give me your dango!”

Hashirama threw back his head, his booming laugh echoing in the clear air. Madara turned to him, eye twitching, and kicked his knee hollows, making him ungracefully tumble to the ground, still howling with laugher. “I touched a Senju; somebody has to give me disinfection”, he spat, making Hashirama laugh even harder, if possible. “I love you”, the Shodaime wheezed. “So much.”

“Don’t make me kick you into your own ugly stone-face again”, Madara warned and finally, Mito stepped forth, ignoring the Hokage’s protest of how their people spent weeks craving it into the mountainside. “Is everyone alright?”, she asked, quickly throwing a glance at the Senju and Uchiha leaders. “Except these two?”

Another Uzumaki spoke up, this time a younger man. “We travelled as fast as possible but crossed the border easily enough”, he reported. “We can only hope our absence hasn’t been discovered too early on.” Meanwhile, his eyes stayed glued to the leader of their future village, who had finally gotten up again, beautiful red flowers he had never seen before growing at his feet as he laughed once more at another biting comment of whom he could only assume was Uchiha Madara.

“I am glad to hear that”, Hashirama smiled. “Please; if anyone of you needs medical attention, don’t hesitate to ask.”

“Better do, or he won’t stop harassing you”, Madara cut in again, making his Kage pout and Yamanaka Ichigo raise his brow. “You are in a mood today”, he noted. The raven huffed. “Stupid idiot couldn’t take a No for an answer and broke into my bedroom after midnight”, he answered, making the Yamanaka leader hum. “Just ask Mito-san to seal your windows”, he advised, having Hashirama laugh sheepishly. “Ahaha, well… Let us get inside”, he offered

quickly, before Madara could actually do so. “Since everything went rather quickly, we don’t have much prepared… however; how about we have a meal; you must be starved after making it all the way here. And afterwards, I will give you a tour? We didn’t know whether you might prefer a compound but please rest assured: None of you will be without home.”

There was exactly one place in Konoha able to seat this many customers and even then, they had to ask for a few chairs from another place a few doors down, having Hashirama leave him a big tip for the inconvenience.

Fortunately (or unfortunately) for Madara, it just had to be the only place offering inarizushi. Thus, simply leaving Hashirama to it and going back home had been impossible, especially since the Hokage insisted in paying for everyone.

Now, he was sitting next to the beaming Senju, within an ocean of redheads, making him feel like the single lost tomoe in a not fully developed Sharingan. At least, the food was delicious, he thought wryly.

“Uchiha-sama?”

Oh, joy, another red-haired brat. There were only seven of them, why did they have to annoy him of all people? Wasn’t Hashirama interesting enough? He swallowed his bite. “What is it?”, he asked.

“Can you show us your Sharingan?”

His chopsticks clattered as they fell to the ground, Madara’s hand going slack.

“Can you show us your Sharingan?” Ryoka had been the first of them to activate his Sharingan, even though he wasn’t the oldest, just a year younger than Izuna. It didn’t save him from being slaughtered, his bloody corpse barely even recognizable, his eyes cut out…

“Aniki! Can you train with us?” Ashikara was the youngest of them. He shouldn’t even be at the battlefield yet, but Tajima had been adamant. He was the clanhead’s son, after all, he wouldn’t stay behind. Every second he could spare, Madara trained with him, desperately hoping it would be enough.

It hadn’t been.

“Madara!”

His eyes hurt, he could feel warmth dripping down his cheeks, the strains smelling of cupper.

It was the middle of the night, Izuna was fast asleep. He cowered on his futon, back pressed against the wall. He was a failure, a disgrace, a shame. Ikutaru had died in his arms today, he had been unable to safe him. Just as he couldn’t save Ryoka and Ashikara before. When his cheeks had grown wet during the funeral, Tajima had slapped him, making his nose bleed. A shame to the Uchiha name, a disgrace, having been named a flaw for a reason.

“Madara!”

Yesterday, he had been forced to leave Hashirama behind. It felt as though he had lost another brother, one he didn't even know of before they had met at the riverbank for the first time. But he didn't have a choice. If he had had refused, Tajima would have found a way to punish Izuna, just to teach his oldest son a lesson. Only the fact that Madara had finally managed to activate his Sharingan had kept him from doing so, anyway.

"Look at me. Madara! Look at me!"

When he had turned his back, Hashirama had called after him, begged him to stay by his side. Just as Ikutaru had, begging Madara not to leave him alone, as his wounds had slowly bled him out. His voice had gotten quieter, at the end, hard to hear, but Madara had listened and bit into his own palm until he broke skin to silence himself as he wanted to scream his agony into the unwavering sky. "It hurts… so much."

"I know, I know. Look at me! Madara!"

Over and over again, Ikutaru's dying words haunted him, slowly fusing with Hashirama's own desperate expression until he couldn't even tell them apart anymore. And it hurt, it hurt, until suddenly, his sight sharpened in blinding pain as though nails were driven into his eye sockets, blood dripping down his cheeks.

Then, everything turned black.

Carefully, Hashirama cradled the Uchiha's limp body to his chest, soothing a strand if hair out of his pale face. His cheeks were painted with bloody tearstains. His heartbeat had calmed, finally, as Hashirama had forced his body into unconsciousness.

"I'm sorry", he apologised, uncertain whether to Madara, the Uzumaki, or the child who hadn't had had *this* intention as he had asked in nothing but curiosity.

From his back, a wooden clone formed, bolting off to inform Tobirama as to have him take over and then Izuna of his brother's breakdown.

"Go." Mito was the first one to speak up. "We'll be fine. We *are* able to have lunch without our Hokage supervising."

For a moment, Hashirama hesitated, then he bolted off, right back to Madara's house, where he entered the front-door. No shinobi bothered locking their door; obviously every one of them could just break the lock, after all. The only way to truly keep people out would be a seal but nobody really bothered with that, too. If they couldn't trust each other, whom could they ever?

He slipped off both of their sandals, before making way to Madara's bedroom, carefully lowering the raven onto his bed and wrapping him in a blanket.

Then, he slid onto the mattress behind him, pulling him to his chest and soothed medical chakra into his slack muscles, doing the only thing he could while waiting for him to wake

up.

“You shouldn’t have seen that.”

Hashirama kissed his neck. “Don’t be sorry”, he answered simply, making Madara close his eyes once more. Hashirama didn’t ask, didn’t prod and Madara was grateful.

“Sometimes, memories are overwhelming”, the raven finally murmured, in lack of anything else to say. He couldn’t tell, didn’t know how to, and even if he tried, the words wouldn’t come. He could feel Hashirama’s arms around him, keeping him secure and safe even though it wasn’t needed; even though Madara could take care of himself. “I wish they didn’t have to die. I wish I had been stronger.”

He could feel something caressing his cheek. “We were children”, Hashirama soothed. “It should have been our parents, keeping us alive and not having us slaughter each other in a senseless war.”

Madara chuckled darkly. “My father attempted to have me cut out my own eyes”, he gave back. Behind him, he could feel the Shodaime tense, his grip tightening. “Hashirama.” His voice was oddly fond. “When I was forced to leave you, I activated my Sharingan. I had never left behind someone living, before, only the dead… maybe that was the true crux, who knows. Two days later… my eyes changed once more. I didn’t know what was going on, didn’t tell anyone, not even Izuna. Why do you think, I never went to battle with them?”

Hashirama blinked. He had never wondered when exactly Madara had achieved the Mangekyou Sharingan, being the first Uchiha to accomplish such (had he named it, too, or had the name been written on that mysterious stone tablet?). He had had to endure the loss of three brothers, none of them bringing his Sharingan to life, but when the raven had felt forced to cut his ties with him all those years back, it had been enough… he could still remember how he had mourned for his best friend, as he realised the true extend of pain the Sharingan forced their wielders to undergo.

“We were in a fight with the Inuzuka”, Madara continued, still not turning around and thus, keeping from eye contact. “Not the Senju, gratefully… but Izuna… was going against three of them to keep my back safe, and they had obviously planned something. I panicked and… it felt as tough something ripped, I still don’t know what or how. I teared them apart, one after another, and the world seemed to go… backwards.” He shook his head, the notion strange since it was still lowered on a cushion. “That was when Tajima first saw these newly developed eyes. And of course, he realised their potential. He… would have cut Izuna’s throat, if I hadn’t obeyed, but…” Madara chuckled darkly, once more. “Izuna gutted him, before I was able to do so. He didn’t even hesitate for a second. And I… wouldn’t have, either.”

Izuna had never truly known the extend of their father’s betrayal; Madara had always taken uttermost care to keep whatever he could of Tajima’s hatred and madness from him… but he still had been helpless, since Izuna had been the one thing Tajima had been able to keep him in line with. And Madara would have cut out his eyes in a heartbeat for him. “We still don’t know how or why the Mangekyou Sharingan is called to life”, the raven finally concluded. “But we assume… it is heavily related to loss. I lost three of my younger brothers… and

then, I lost you. Izuna lost whatever illusion of a father had still remained, on that day, or would have lost me."

No Uchiha present had opposed the brothers taking over leadership, after that. Tajima had broken the sacred laws of their clan as he had turned against family. Only three weeks later, Hashirama had taken over leadership of the Senju clan, as well.

"We have soon come to realise, usage of the Mangekyou Sharingan drains the user's eyesight rapidly", Madara finally concluded. "But that wasn't why we refrained from using it. It would only have been a matter of time until we would have been blackmailed again; our eyes for clan-life. The fewer people knew, the better. Thus, we had sworn to use them only in uttermost desperation." He sighed. His health had already waned badly, at that point. He had had his final orders already prepared, including Izuna talking his eyes; either to keep them if his own left him blind or burn them as to never let them fall into wrong hands. "But then we founded Konoha… and Kurama happened."

Hashirama deliberately remained silent. Madara had just opened up and bared himself to him; he couldn't betray this trust and let his anger in the face of what he had just been told show. That wasn't what he needed right now. "Marry me?", he asked instead, making him feel Madara's soft smile even though he couldn't see it. "Not now, idiot."

He brushed raven hair aside, to kiss the Uchiha's pale neck. Not now, but neither never. That was enough, for now.

Chapter End Notes

If Madara was the one to actually name the Mangekyou Sharingan, he's even worse with names than Hashirama. Just saying.

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

> That moment some assholes get mad because they're afraid your superpower-DNA gets lost...

Chapter Notes

> People: So, how much porn are you willing to put into this?
> Me: Yes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hirasishin!”

Tobirama vanished from existence and immediately, Kakuzu started kneading chakra and taking notes, before fifteen seconds later, both, Izuna and Tobirama re-appeared exactly where they had left. “It’s working”, the assassin noted, before carefully watching the younger Senju. His breathing was harsh and overall, he looked like a pale piece of shit. Kakuzu returned to their notes, adding ‘Severe strains on the metabolism’.

Izuna rolled his eyes. “You know, you could have waited until we’d had checked this out. But No, you finally completed that Hirasishin-technique of yours, Kuzu had another tremendous idea and you just decided Fuck it, I’ll totally risk my neck.”

“Worth it”, Tobirama managed to get out in between his panting breaths, making Kakuzu huff. “Do you need mouth-to-mouth, or should we just dispose your body when you’re finally done for?” “Fuck you”, the albino snarled, however; Izuna grinned at the masked man. “I might need some, though.”

Kakuzu didn’t even deem the Uchiha hitting on him worthy of an answer, instead crossing his arms. “If we further develop this, I will jump”, he deemed. “My body is advanced further than yours, I will be able to endure more stress.”

Tobirama decided to screw his pride and took a seat, since his legs didn’t stop trembling. “You cannot even cast the jutsu.”

The assassin rose a dark brow. “Oh no”, he drawled, dark voice dripping in sarcasm. “Our plans are cancelled; Tobirama refuses to share his Hirasishin-technique but his body is too weak to even endure a twenty-second-jump.”

“We don’t even know for certain yours will bear the strain better”, Tobirama argued, making the others rise a judgemental brow at him. Kakuzu had his body modified to its absolute limits; if anyone would be able to take further jumps, it was him.

Not even two hours ago, Tobirama had finally presented them his newly developed jutsu; a technique he was able to instantly teleport to any location previously marked with his own developed seals. And even though all of them agreed for this to be pretty neat, it hadn’t even taken five minutes for Kakuzu to come up with the question they had just gotten their answer to.

The Hirasishin was a space-time technique, rather closely related to summoning contracts. If the caster truly was able to instantly appear at any point previously marked, would he be able to even teleport to another period of time, if the marker would move to such? Or, to be blunt: If Izuna called forth his Mangekyou Sharingan and skipped time, would Tobirama still be able to teleport to him, even if his target technically didn’t exist in his current time period anymore? As their experiment had proved, Tobirama’s Hirasishin not only was able to cross space, but also time. However; since the Senju still was breathing heavily, the technique put its caster’s body under enormous strain, way more than Izuna’s Time-Skip did which wasn’t even noticeable to any target other than the Uchiha himself.

Still.

With this newly developed jutsu, they would be able to further deepen the possibilities of his doujutsu. Izuna grabbed a dango. “This is gonna be awesome.”

Madara’s coughs echoed through the house in a rather ugly manner, wet and rattling and Hashirama hummed, his palms soothing the trembling chest beneath them. “The humidity worsens your symptoms”, he noted. It had been raining every day for nearly two weeks; an unusual occurrence in the Country of Fire, and Madara’s lungs seemed to severely disagree with the weather.

“No shit”, the raven coughed, taking longer than usual to calm after his weekly treatment. When his breathing had finally eased, Hashirama gently kissed him, only for Madara to grasp his hair and pull him in for a deeper kiss, their tongues meeting halfway. Hashirama couldn’t help but grind against him, his quickly rising erection straining against his trousers, however; was pushed off just a moment later, making him whine. “Madara!” “We have a meeting to attend to.”

“But not until three”, Hashirama argued, resulting in a slender brow rising at him. “That happens to be in less than ten minutes, you moron.” “But… But you started it”, the Senju protested, put out. “And I ended it”, was the brutal answer, making the Hokage pout as Madara straightened his clothes. Just a few minutes more would have been enough for both of them…

But unfortunately, Madara was right. The Elders of their clans had scheduled a clan-meeting which was a rare occasion on its own since they preferred bickering in private. But firstly, they had ordered for it to include both, Senju and Uchiha alike. And just because that

apparently hadn't been enough, they had decided for it to be a public one, not only between the two clans but rather the whole village. Long story short: Uchiha, Senju and whoever else was daring to would gather at the plaza within the next… eight minutes. "Get going, Senju."

Despite Hashirama's pouting protests, they made it two minutes early. The plaza was already crowded, even a few Uzumaki had joined. The Elders had already taken their seats, as well, making Madara wonder what they were up to this time. The two of them took their places to the left and right in front of them, the same ones they had already taken during the Kage-elections. The last minutes ticked down, and finally, Hibiko spoke up.

"During the last weeks, we have noticed a rift forming between some members of our clans and their leaders." Her voice was slightly roughened with age but nevertheless carried across the plaza. "We cannot afford such to deepen, neither as clans, nor as village. Therefore, we have decided to schedule this public assembly to solve these issues once and for all."

Hashirama blinked. Rifts? He hadn't noticed any; the clans had come to love this new way of life, the Uzumaki had been invited with open arms and were integrating even faster than they had hoped for, even though they had asked for their own compound despite their small numbers.

Finally, a group of a little less than twenty shinobi mixed from both of their clans stepped forth and Madara had to suppress the urge to just fuck it all and go home for a nap.

"Hashirama-sama." It was one of the Senju speaking up, Madara couldn't remember his name. An older shinobi, past his prime but doubtlessly powerful if he still was alive. "We have gathered because all of us worry about the matter of your… current affairs." Hashirama blinked. What was that supposed to mean? However; before he could ask for clarification, another of his clansmen spoke up. "Your… cravings did already cost us ties with Uzushiogakure! How much more are you willing you force upon us?"

Hashirama blinked once more. "This is… about me and Madara?", he realised, making the raven huff. "Oh, joy", he drawled. "Took you long enough."

"You have spurned Mito-sama", mind the honorific, Madara noted wryly, as the first Senju - Takeraku was his name, he now remembered- started talking again, "And force all of us to accept your… unnatural preferences despite the disastrous consequences. We cannot simply ignore such any longer and ask you to reconsider."

Madara leaned back in his chair, a rather bored expression on his face. "And what are the Uchiha up to", he demanded. "There are eight of you, after all. Hotaka…" Why wasn't he even surprised the man was amongst these people. "I considered our quarrel solved but apparently, I was wrong. Did you find others to drag here, too?"

"We are here because neither of us can accept a clanhead willing to be taken like a-" "A common whore, I remember. We already had that conversation, so please spare me the boredom", the clanhead drawled, however; Hashirama had stiffened. "What was that?", he demanded in disbelief that might even evolve to anger. But before it was able to, Haisoku, the youngest of the assembled Uchiha squad, spoke up. "Ever since the creation of this village, you have been utterly dependant on Senju Hashirama, to the point where your life depends on

his arbitrariness. You have to realise the humiliation the clan is forced to endure every shameful day!"

Madara lifted one of his slim brows. "As soon as you meet someone else able to keep me breathing, I'll gladly let them try", he noted. "Until then, I'm afraid my options are rather limited, and I'm bound to stick with this idiot." Everyone within their village was very aware, after all, his health was a fucking mess and only Hashirama was able to deal with it.

Takeraku, who apparently spoke for the Senju in this little battalion, decided to step in again, this time addressing Hashirama. "Since the Uchiha agree with us on those terms", he deemed, "We ask of you to see sense, as well, and finally abandon this perverse liaison to fulfil your promise to Mito-sama… or step back from your positions."

Laughter cut in before he even was able to complete the sentence, as Madara's amusement pierced through the strange atmosphere. "You", he managed to get out, before succumbing to laughter once more, "You ask the God of Shinobi himself to step down from his position as the village's head because he-" "He cannot even sire offspring in this morbid affair", another Senju spat, only resulting in Hashirama asking in disbelief: "The reason you ask me to break with Madara is because I might not reproduce?"

By now, Madara's laugher had died down to a chuckle. "To be honest", the raven snickered, "Your cock *is* one of your biggest benefits."

"Madara!", the Shodaime cried out in affront.

"If you are unable to take a situation this dire seriously, you truly are unfitting to lead our clan", Hotaka growled.

Madara's chuckle stopped, perhaps a little too brusquely. "You want me to take this seriously?", he then asked, taking a step forth, effectively blocking Hashirama from their view, making the Shodaime's stomach throb with worry. "Madara-" "Very well, then", the Uchiha leader continued, without even acknowledging his Kage attempting to cut in. "If you want me to take you seriously…" A wall of chakra sprung into existence, as skeleton ribs enclosed him, immediately followed by a set of arms as well as a skull. Then, flesh started covering the bare bones; skin knitting over it, until a snarling face watched them underneath its armour, as a midnight blue Susano'o growled in rage. "… I will."

The nineteen shinobi facing him blanched, however; Hotaka apparently had expected no less and grit his teeth.

"If you wish to harm my Kage, you will have to pass me", Madara declared, his voice rippling with darkness, as katana manifested into his armoured Susano'o's hands, ready to strike whenever necessary. "If you dare, that is."

The silence was thick enough to cut; Madara's chakra leaving no doubt it would crush anyone daring to step closer, until Hashirama finally spoke up again. "Love, please calm down. These are clansmen of yours; you would never forgive yourself hurting any of them." He carefully stepped inside the armoured chakra construct; the halfway formed avatar easily letting him pass its protection. "We will solve this issue the only right way: United."

His warm palm lowered onto the Uchiha's shoulder as the seconds ticked down, until finally, the armoured construct retreated, and as its summoner's eyes rotated slower, until even his Sharingan disappeared, leaving his irises pitch-black. Wordlessly, Hashirama squeezed his shoulder.

"We might be separated in clans", he then declared, stepping aside to face all those who had assembled on the plaza. Senju and Uchiha, mainly, but mingled in between he could easily make out Uzumaki-hair, a few Yamanaka crests, as well members of all the other clans who had made Konoha their home. "But we are united as a village; every one of us makes Konohagakure. I am aware this… situation is difficult, for all of us. But I will not force myself into a position of power I am unwanted for, which is why-" "Which is why prior to this gathering, we have already consulted every adult member of both, Senju and Uchiha", Makoto cut in, taking a small scroll and unrolling it, making Hashirama blink. They did? He hadn't even noticed! However; yesterday all five of them -him, Madara, their brothers, as well as Kakuzu- had been working in the tower all day and when they had finally had finished the most pressing matters, gone home to get some much needed sleep, apparently missing this whole procedure.

"The Uchiha deeming Madara-sama unfit to lead the clan anymore are counted nine", Makoto went on. "Of those, seven demand of him to abandon his position." Madara blinked. Seven? That was even less than the eight people Hotaka had gathered, himself included. And why the hell would people deem him unfit yet still not wanting him to step down? Because he still was the strongest and thus, rightfully held his position, according to clan-law? Probably, he realised.

"Of the Senju", Hibiko continued as Makoto had finished, "Three consider Hashirama-sama unfit for leadership. However; eleven wish him to step down from his responsibility as clan-head." Hashirama blinked. That made no sense. Why would people consider him fit for leadership but still wanted him to stop being clan-head? He sighed, silently wondering why politics had to be so very complicated. Unfortunately, before he was able to ask, Hibiko resumed talking. "We cannot speak for his position as Hokage, since such would require consulting all clans", she continued. "However; with the number of disapprovals being this low, Uchiha and Senju have acknowledged their wish for our clanheads to maintain their position, as the village's new concept of democracy demands. Therefore, all of us Elders consider this dispute settled and will not support further demands."

With that, all five of them rose from their chairs, apparently not interested in staying any longer. Hashirama blinked, a little thrown off. Had they just settled this whole affair in two minutes? But why then have this gathering in the first place? But well, his mother had always told him how people tended to get strange by age. Maybe -probably- even Elders were affected by whatever happened to one's brain over the age of sixty.

Finally, Madara was the one to break the baffled silence, turning back to those of their clans who apparently had started this whole quarrel, his grin a tad too maniac, perhaps. "As soon as we're home", he informed them, voice slowly starting to turn into snarl again, as he took a step forward, shaking off Hashirama's soothing touch, "I will have him *pound* into me until I *scream* his fucking name." Despite Madara's rather average size (right next to Hashirama, he always seemed smaller), he seemed to tower above the small group, involuntary forcing them

to take a step back. “And when he is done, I will have him start all over because his stamina is just as infinite as his healing rate… and there is nothing. *You. Can do. About it.*”

Hashirama felt his cheeks heating up. “Madara!”

“Madara…”

Underneath him, the Uchiha moaned wordlessly, as a few twines wrapped around his upper body, one of them tugging on his oversensitive nipple, making him bite his lower lip. Apparently, Hashirama had decided to prove his announcement true… and it was worth every second.

The Shodaime had already climaxed twice, taking Madara with him over the edge as he had filled him the second time, however; was still deeply buried inside him. Out of half-lidded eyes, he watched the Kami no Shinobi, as his hair fell on both sides of their faces like a curtain, shutting them off from the outside world. Using the one hand he didn’t need to keep himself hovering above the Uchiha, he lifted his chin, before lowering his mouth just under and sucking another dark bruise right onto the side of his throat.

His other hand was clasped around one of Madara’s, keeping him upright, as he didn’t even move but simply stayed within the raven’s tight heat. By now, vines and tendrils had tightly wrapped around his body, one even keeping his hair aside for their master. Others simply wouldn’t stop teasing his already hypersensitive nipples, and every now and then, he could even feel one carefully prod the hole Hashirama had buried himself into all the way to the root, waiting until Madara’s own member hardened again.

His eyes had fallen shut and he could feel Hashirama’s teeth tug on the love bites he had covered him with. “I love you”, the taller man murmured into his ear, licking the shell and sending Goosebumps down his back. “More than everything else.”

“Stop being sappy, this isn’t- *Ahhhh!*” He gasped for breath as Hashirama carefully moved within him, every nerve hyperaware of the large girth that refused to slip out of him, still filling every spec of space within him.

And then, he couldn’t surpass moaning the Senju’s name as the small vine that so far had only prodded his entrance slipped inside, filling him up even further and his body tensed under the additional girth. Hashirama kissed his cheek, carefully tugging his lower lip from between his teeth to prevent it being bitten bloody.

“It’s alright”, he murmured on his lips, slipping his tongue inside and licking the willingly offered mouth as he ever so carefully started moving, always keeping close eye to the Uchiha’s reaction as the additional vine thrusted alongside him, filling the tight, hot hole further even though seemingly no place left to fill had existed prior.

Madara loved his vines, his trees, his Mokuton and Hashirama couldn’t help but be incredibly grateful. Deep down, he had always feared that one day, his spouse would look at them and spurn him, deem him nothing but an adnomination, a monster. This was a deeply rooted part

of him, his plants had always been manifestations of himself, his cravings and will. Lovingly, he kissed the Uchiha once more. “Didn’t you tell them you would scream my name?”, he asked, making the raven underneath him huff breathlessly. “Make me”, he challenged and then his scream of “*Hashirama!*” echoed between the walls, as Hashirama started stroking his aching cock into full erection once more. His head fell back, as the vines around them lifted his upper body, gaining their Master easier access as he licked over a puffy nipple, tongue covered in soothing chakra.

He could feel the remains of Hashirama’s first release cooling on his stomach, however; the notion was soon forgotten as once more the Senju started pounding into him, drawing back farther each time, only to thrust back in, while the vine inside him moved at its own pace, taking great duty in caring for the emptiness whenever Hashirama didn’t fill him to the hilt.

He could feel the vine’s harshness within him, as his walls clamped around it in climax, voice slightly rough as the moaned the Shodaime’s name. Mere moments later, he sighed in bliss as he felt himself being filled once more with hot come, leaving even Hashirama satisfied for the time being, his previous erection now easily able to slip out of him, as the vine retreated as well, but not without caressing his oversensitive prostate once more, making him gasp in a feeling somewhere between pain from sheer overuse and pleasure.

He could feel himself being drawn into a pair of tanned arms and his eyes slid close despite the fact he really should clean himself up. “I never imagined it to be so-” “Perfect?”, Hashirama offered, making Madara huff, before correcting: “Peaceful.” He would clean up later, he decided…

“*Indra!!*”

His eyes sprung open and he immediately started kneading chakra. Peace was obviously only available in short doses, he deemed wryly.

“I have found it, brother! I have found father’s grave!”

Chapter End Notes

Please remember:
Comments are every hobby-author's only payment, we don't get anything else for our work. So please, remember every now and then, to leave few words for us :)

And always: Stay healthy!

Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

In which everybody's glad Izuna doesn't know any of those annoying travelling-songs.
Also, prepare for feels.

Chapter Notes

So many of you left a comment after the last chapter!
Thank you so, SO much, you don't even know how much it means to me! Especially considering this chapter has somehow been really, really tough to write...
I promise I will answer your amazing comments, but it's nearly 3 am and I am deadly tired. I will do so tomorrow, I promise!

As always: Stay healthy, stay safe, where ever you are.

Cursing under his breath, Madara roughly pulled on a kimono while Hashirama quickly grabbed the ugly striped hakama Madara would definitely burn once the Senju wasn't looking.

"Indra", the Kyuubi called again, his mass of chakra nearing at a fast path. "Ashura!"

"On our way!", Madara yelled back, being done with his clothes father than Hashirama, who had to put on different pieces. However; it did merely take a few seconds more until he was ready, as well, and the both of them quickly took off.

A little desperately, Hashirama glanced at the mess of raven hair on the Uchiha's head. While even untameable under normal circumstances, it left absolutely no doubt about what had happened between the two of them… Next to him, Tobirama and Izuna appeared, the latter holding out a leather-ribbon. Without even pausing his step, Madara gathered as much of his hair as he was able to (admittedly fighting with it for a moment or two), before swiftly tying his raven mane up to tame the mess.

Next to him, Hashirama swallowed. Madara had never tied up his hair before, always taking pride in it, as no one had ever come close to use this single indulge in vanity against him in battle. That was… until his Mokuton had caressed it aside last night, carefully tying it next to his face, as to bare the raven's throat to- "Get a grip", Tobirama hissed at him, making him flinch. He had been staring, hadn't he? At least Madara apparently hadn't noticed…

By now, they had reached the village's outskirts, already able to see Kurama closing in -and Matatabi as well, who apparently had also heard the fox call out for them. Minutes later, the six of them met up, far enough off the village to keep the two Bijuu from demolishing any houses by accident -especially considering Kurama's many tails.

"I've found father's grave", the Kyuubi repeated, and before any of them could answer, Matatabi already cut in. "Ashura never told anyone of father's grave! It's been an eon… are you certain?"

Kurama bared his teeth ever so slightly as his sister doubted him. "I am. And besides: Who else would dare bearing his signet?"

Tobirama was the first one to speak up. "You… found the Sage's grave?", he clarified, making Kurama snarl. Didn't anyone hear what he'd just said? "We need to tell the others", Matatabi exclaimed. "They would like to… be aware, at least."

"We had an era so search, yet none of us ever did", the Nine-Tails disagreed. "We were too wrapped up in grief… and afterwards, hatred." Something Hagoromo never would have wanted in the first place. "We probably can't even enter", he then continued, "The place is too small." Due to their father ordering such, most likely. His large ears lowered a little in sadness. Hagoromo always had been a humble man, he wouldn't have wanted his grave to be a mausoleum. But since Ashura had cut all contact to his tailed siblings, none of them had ever known the location of the Sage's grave.

"Ah!" Hashirama peeked up. "I could do something about that!"

Tobirama felt his forehead twitching. "Anija-"

"If it's about the size, I could surely help with that", the Hokage waltzed on. He would have to see the place first, obviously. But he was pretty certain he would find a way to fit at least the Bijuus' heads inside. Kurama blinked, his giant face lowering. He had wanted for Ashura and Indra to see their father's final rest… hoping against hope it might evoke some memories within them, bring back some of their long-lost brothers. But the possibility of maybe even seeing Hagoromo's grave himself was strangely encouraging, as well.

Ashura watched them with a beaming smile, before turning to Indra. "Are you coming, too?"

"Already did", the raven drawled, making Ashura's coffee-taint skin blush strawberry red. "Madara!" "I won't be letting you leave alone", the Uchiha stated and crossed his arms. "You'll get lost in bullshit, otherwise, and I am not going lead this mess of a village if you fuck up."

Hashirama's head slammed down, clouds of depression shadowing his features. "Is it that bad…?"

The two Bijuu watched in slight confusion, as Ashura continued moping. "Well, I really want to see the Sage's grave", Izuna finally cut in, making Tobirama pinch the bridge of his nose. "We can't just leave the village unprotected", he chastised. "Anija; you are Hokage. It is your duty to protect Konoha."

Hashirama's head lowered in sadness. Tobirama was right; he couldn't just leave the village for however long this journey might take. It was his duty, after all, to protect everyone within. Madara huffed. "Even a wooden clone of yours is able to crush basically any possible threat", he noted. The Kami no Shinobi beamed at him, as though that idea never would have come to him -which was way too likely. "You're right!"

Once more, Tobirama pinched the bridge of his nose. "In that case, I will have to accompany you."

Izuna nodded. It made sense; if it came down to it, Tobirama was the only one able to teleport himself -and the rest of them- back to the village. "Kuzu'll have to stay here", Izuna realised. "That'd be at least one of us." "I can't teach him the Hirasishin in a day", Tobirama growled. "We'll need some way to communicate." "Pretty sure the Yamanaka might have an idea."

Hashirama blinked. "They're ignoring us", he protested at Madara, making the raven roll his eyes. "No shit."

Two and a half days was all it took for them to prepare for the Hokage, his sole advisor and their little brothers to leave the village. Just to be on the save side, Hashirama didn't leave just one but two wooden clones behind. As expected, the Yamanaka had been able to offer a solution for their communication problem. Kakuzu would contact them immediately in case of emergency and Tobirama would be able to instantly teleport them back to the village, using the long-distance seals he had prepared.

However; these preparations would hopefully not be needed. Kurama had insisted it wouldn't be that long of a trip, no more than five days if nothing unexpectant happened during their journey.

Provisions had been sealed into scrolls and finally, they met up at Matatabi's glade, ready to go.

"Climb on, brother", Kurama offered. "We'll be faster that way. And…" His gaze flicked to Izuna. "You, too, I guess… can't leave you walking, you will never catch up."

"Thanks", Izuna answered wryly, lowering himself cross-legged onto the thick fur next to one long fox-ear. Next to them, Hashirama and Tobirama took place on Matatabi's head, the Two-Tails chakra-flames licking at their skin harmlessly. "Lead the way, Kurama", she offered, making the Kyuubi grin. "South. Always south, until we reach the sea!"

With that, the chakra-beast jumped off, leashing down the forest, heading towards his goal. "Whoa!" Izuna grabbed the giant, fluffy ear next to him and Kurama laughed, as his path steadied, next to him Matatabi, who easily kept up with her brother, her four legs making it easy for her to race alongside him.

"We've done a lot of awesome shit during the last two years but riding on a Bijuu to visit the Sage's grave tops it all", Izuna called over the biting wind and Hashirama's laughter seemed

to be carried by the breeze. “The world is changing”, the God of Shinobi called back, his eyes gleaming in joy. “Every day, we stride further to peace! The era of war is over!”

As the Bijuu raced across the land, the trees seemed to share their Master’s laughter.

Kurama had told them that he had needed a little less than two days to make way back to Konoha. He had neither known nor cared if he crossed borders but considering his description, their destination had to be either on the outskirts of Fire Country or located in Tea Country. They would make their way to the Sea of Fire and then always keep close to the coast, until they reached their goal, hidden somewhere deep within the age-old forests.

The Bijuu travelled at a fast path, dwarfing the forest with their size. Madara leaned onto the single ear next to him and watched the landscape pass. They had gotten up quite early to depart straight after sunrise and he could feel his eyelids starting to droop due to the steady motion almost lulling him to sleep.

It was strange, Madara mused on the next day’s afternoon, how two giant living chakra constructs could travel all across Fire Country and still not meet a single human soul. Yesterday, they had decided to rest as soon as they had made it to the sea. None of them had ever travelled this far south and thus, the endless waters had been an overwhelming view. They had decided to take rest at the shore, and due to the two Bijuu watching out, even been able to get a full night’s sleep without having to share guard-duty.

To Madara’s surprise, Izuna had been the one most reluctant to leave their place the morning after, but since from now on, they would mostly stay close to the shores, they didn’t get to miss the glittering waters. Thus, they had gotten to enjoy the view until recently, when Kurama had decided to move deeper into the thick greens of the forest, stating that it wouldn’t be long from now.

“I don’t think we’ve crossed the border yet, but I can’t really tell”, Hashirama noted. Tobirama, as always, was able to help with that. “We’re still in Fire Country”, he answered. “But at this pace, we’ll cross the border to Tea Country within the hour.”

“Do we need to inform the authorities? We can’t be just invading”, the Hokage worried, making Madara roll his eyes. “You are probably the most powerful being alive and are accompanied by two Bijuu. You might consider re-defining the term ‘authority’.”

Hashirama blinked. “But… I won’t just cross whatever border I want to, merely because people are unable to stop me”, he protested. “Pity for you”, the Uchiha leader drawled from between Kurama’s ears. “I will.”

“Madara!”

“It isn’t much farther”, Kurama finally cut in. “If anyone dares to halt us, I will devour them alive!”

Madara tugged on the ear he was leaning on. “Remember how *that* worked out the last time”, he warned, receiving an unwilling growl in response.

Soon after, the Kyuubi slowed down. The forest around them was old; thick and knobby oaks forcing the Bijuu to continue carefully if they didn’t want to tear the ancient trees down. “I can feel it”, Matatabi finally realised, her voice filled with excitement. “It can’t be far from here!”

“I just feel my sunburn”, Izuna complained, making Madara roll his eyes. “I told you not to take off your sleeves”, he chastised, having his brother grumble. However, minutes later the two Bijuu had reached their destination.

“This is it”, Matatabi whispered -or came as close as she could, considering her booming voice. “Behind these doors, father rests.”

Madara leaped down, the other three right after him. In front of them, craved into the solid stonewall of a rather large hill that had long since grown over with plant-life, a double-gate gleamed in the evening sun. The gates obviously once had shone perfectly white; now they were covered with roots and vines, one of them even thicker than a human body. The double-gate wasn’t even that large; probably double of Hashirama’s hight and slightly wider.

Upon a single wave of Hashirama, the plants retreated, offering what once had been a beautifully designed gate but by now, time had left its marks. However; the nine symbols were still visible on its middle. There were nine of them, each shaped like a… tomoe, Madara couldn’t help but recognise. They had once been red, probably, but the colour had long since faded.

The Bijuu wouldn’t even be able to fit their heads through the gate, Hashirama noted. But… “I’ll probably be able to enlarge the place as soon as I have seen the inside structure”, he told them. Without such, he couldn’t erase the possibility of ultimately ruining the temple’s insides.

“So…” Izuna started. “We just… open the gate?”

Behind them, Kurama huffed. “There probably were enough who have tried”, he answered, before extending his fingers and with a single claw, proceeded to tab the gate. The tomoe started swirling and with an eerie silence, the white gates opened.

With a flicker, two torches lit at the entrance, luminating the way to a dark chamber.

“Go forth”, Matatabi offered. “We will wait for you.”

Hashirama nodded. He still hadn’t seen the tomb’s layout; as soon as he had, he probably would be able to extend the place. For another moment, the four of them watched the open gate. Behind these doors, the Sage of Six Paths was laying in his eternal rest for… ages.

Madara was the first one to step forth, the others swiftly following next to him, as they crossed the opened gate, entering the dimly lit room. More torches lit as they progressed, casting the flames’ warm, orange glow into the room. It was smaller than Hashirama had

expected, around the size of a house, even though perfectly rectangular… and completely empty, safe for the opposite wall. A great drawing decorated the otherwise empty white stone, showing three people.

The right man was young, a kind expression on his face, dark eyes smiling. His hair, a rich brown, was short and kept in place by a white headband, save for two carefully separated strands decorating his temples.

The left man was equally young, his hair so dark it seemed almost black in the flames' light, long and carefully tied. His face was of fair taint, the contrast with his dark hair making it seem glowing… his red eyes and their familiar pattern seemed to watch their every step. Both of them were clad in white robes, carefully contrasted from the pale wall.

In their middle, a man stood, his regal face proud, wise and… entirely unhuman. He was of fair skin, as well, but his violet eyes and the third one on his forehead, as well as his… horns? Were those horns? Hashirama wasn't certain, but they looked like it, spoke of divinity. One of his hands each was resting on his sons' -because who else could they be- shoulders.

In front of the wall rested a sarcophagus, built of the same white stone the tomb was carved from. It was a simple monument, only decorated by the same nine tomoe they had already seen at the entrance-gates. The rest of the large room was absolutely empty, safe for two white chairs to the left and the right of the sarcophagus, apparently waiting for someone to take a seat next to the ever-resting Sage.

Izuna swallowed audibly. This was so… strange. Not even intimidating, though. The entire room screamed of something… else. A desperate yearning, an ever-lasting hope but still expecting disappointment at the same time. "They… look like you", he whispered as the four of them stepped closer under the Sharingan of who must have been Indra and his younger brother Ashura.

"Those chairs were meant for them", Tobirama realised. Even against all reason, the Sage had hoped for his sons to return one day...

Hashirama carefully caressed the right chair's backrest. He felt incredibly subdued, suddenly. This place carried an intense amount of sadness and longing…

"Is that you… my son?"

The four of them flinched upon the sudden voice, echoing in the large room.

"I should have known… Ashura always kept his promises. Even those to dying, old men."

The flickering lights shuddered as the room seemed to be taken over by a warmer, golden light. Fabric shifted, making them whirl around and face the pale figure clad in white robes, floating perfectly cross-legged just above the white sarcophagus. His palms rested on his knees in perfect composure, however; his face seemed to overflow with emotions.

"You are… the Sage", Izuna whispered, making the man turn to him but as his purple, ringed eyes passed Madara, he stopped.

“I know you are not him”, the man said. He was old, obviously, his face wrinkled, his hair and long beard fully grey. He stretched out his hand, carefully cupping Madara’s face. “I apologise… but you remind me very much of my son”, the Sage said, voice carrying an age-old sadness. Then, he retreated and took moment to take in the four men. “I feel Kurama outside… and Matatabi”, he noted, after taking a moment to regain his composure. “I am Ōtsutsuki Hagoromo”, he then introduced himself. “This tomb was carved prior to my death, upon my will, as I hoped against all hope to unite with my sons one day.” His eyes closed for a moment. “As you are here, I imagine you have been told of their fate… and of mine.” He didn’t even ask about their two younger brothers being present as well. Whether he didn’t notice or simply didn’t care, none of them were able to work out.

Hashirama was the one to speak up first. “We only know what the Bijuu told us. That you named Ashura your successor, but Indra disagreed. That they fought and Ashura… killed his brother.”

The Sage -Hagoromo, Tobirama reminded himself- lowered his head, his long beard nearly touching the sarcophagus. “When I decided to follow my younger son’s way of love, I never imagined the consequences”, he lamented. “But the situation spun out of my control; Indra was unwilling to listen, he felt as though I had abandoned him by choosing his younger brother.” His divine eyes shone in grief. “Indra swore vengeance… and upon my deathbed, Ashura promised to follow his brother, until the day him and Indra may reconcile. None of them ever found peace… And I realised I had failed as a father… Not merely to one of my sons, but both.”

Madara’s deprecatory huff interrupted the silence. “Did you ever attempt ripping out your son’s eyeballs?” As expected, his question was answered with silence as the Sage merely watched him, facial expression unreadable and the Uchiha answered his own question. “In that case, you have been a better father than mine.”

Hashirama’s heart got heavy with sorrow as he watched his lover’s bitter features but Izuna was the one to speak up first, his expression a picture of grief. “Aniki…”

Finally, Hagoromo faced the younger Uchiha. “You are his brother?”, he asked, making Madara smile without even realising his expression shift. “My younger brother”, he corrected, as his sibling continued: “Uchiha Izuna… Sage-sama.”

An unbidden smile crossed the Sage’s features. “You may call me Hagoromo, child”, he deemed. “But pray tell me… how is it that after ages, my tomb has been opened by those who have long ago been the sons I failed so pitifully?”

It was a long story and Tobirama was the one to tell it, since Hashirama’s version would be too generous, Madara’s too depressive, and Izuna’s… probably too sarcastic. Hagoromo listened, his expression carefully neutral as the younger Senju told him of generations of war and bloodshed. Of his own brother, desperate to end the ever-lasting deaths, a boy at a riverbank wishing just the same and the long, long years fate had deemed their dreams hopeless. And then, of the place they had build together, children playing in the streets, Matatabi resting on her glade, of the peace they had made, the future they hoped for.

When he was done, the silence seemed to echo within the tomb until finally, a soft smile muddled with sadness broke the Sage's wrinkled features. "You have made it, then", he realised. "All these years… all these lifetimes…" Just for one goal, ever and ever failing until finally… "I will admit; I didn't expect your reconciliation under… these particular circumstances", the Sage deemed, making Hashirama blush. However; before the Senju was able to embarrass himself even further, Hagoromo spoke up again. "But it matters little. As much as I might yearn, you are not my sons… not in this life, at least." Maybe one day, they would be re-united, he hoped. When their dispute was settled, when peace had finally been made. "I failed my sons", the Sage continued calmly, however; underneath his features a new kind of determination lingered. "But I will do whatever lies within my power, to allow your peace to grow and nurture." His hands rose until, palms facing up, he offered his hands, wrinkled with age but mighty.

Nearly unintended, the two clan leaders stepped forth, sharing one last glance until finally, each lowered their hand onto the Sage's; Hashirama's right palm and Madara's left being clasped by strong fingers.

And then, without premise, the Sage pulled the two of them towards his still floating figure, wrapping his arms around them, and Izuna could clearly make out the single tear dripping down his face. Carefully, he lowered his head, pressing a single kiss onto Madara's forehead, before doing the same to Hashirama and for a long moment, he could see their brothers' figures blurring, as though being overlapped by another presence as someone with a voice not too far from Hashirama's whispered: "I promised", making the old man cling to the men in front of them even tighter, as he shuddered and another tear-strain decorated his cheek.

And just like that, it was over.

The light dimmed back to a flickering red and yellow, as the torches barely lit the room, the sarcophagus still resting right under the drawling of the Sage and his two lost sons, two chairs hoping to be filled next to it.

As though nothing had ever happened in the first place; everything but a divine dream.

Hashirama swallowed, wiping away the sole tearstain on Madara's pale face.

"Your eyes…"

Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

aka the chapter the author fucking hates because it's kinda in-between and I struggled with this for a month. Sorry, I promise better content ^^'

Chapter Notes

Yeah, who climbs out of her self-dug hole? It's me!
I'm really sorry this took so long... this actually got finished because I decided to kick my own ass due to the Hashimada tumblr stuff happening.
Thank you to all of you who comment and leave Kudos! Some of you even did in Spanish. Unfortunatelly, I don't speak Spanish, just German, English and French (I'm currently trying to learn Portugese but I suck) so I have to ask DeepL to translate for me. But that doesn't make me any less happy, so if you like to comment in your mothertongue, don't be afraid :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Madara blinked. “It feels… strange”, he murmured, as Hashirama’s fingertips caressed one closed eyelid. Then he turned around, his purple eyes meeting Izuna’s worried gaze, making his younger brother swallow at the piercing rings. “Can you… do anything with them?”, his younger brother asked, making Madara blink once more. “It feels like it”, he murmured, still seeming distracted. He could feel it; unimaginable potential waited within these eyes, but they still seemed… foreign to him. Like an artificial part of himself his body was unused to, however; still accepted it.

“What about you, Anija?”, Tobirama asked, making Hashirama blink. “Me?” What about him? His field of vision hadn’t changed, and he didn’t even have any dōjutsu. Madara rolled his eyes; the notion seemed strange due to their distracting pattern. “He’s referring to those orbs”, he stated, however; Hashirama didn’t really seem any smarter than before. “Orbs?”, he asked, dumbfounded, only for nine perfectly round black balls to emerge from behind his back, each the size of his fist and floating in a perfect circle. He resisted the urge to touch them, but as he focussed on one, it swirled and flattened, changing forms.

“You know how yesterday I said riding on a Bijuu’s back was the most awesome shit to ever happen?”, Izuna asked wryly. “Well, I’m taking it back.” Seriously; his life couldn’t turn into an even worse shit-show, if he tried.

“What even are those things?”, Madara demanded, his piercing eyes watching the orbs as Hashirama had them dance in a swirling pattern around him. The Hokage shrugged. “I don’t even have the faintest idea”, he answered honestly, but unfortunately entirely unhelpful.

Unsurprisingly, Izuna was the first one to give in to curiosity and extended a finger to poke one of the floating orbs, Hashirama carefully steering it a little closer to him. Madara blinked. “I don’t think that’s a good-” the last word got drowned with the sound of Izuna crashing into the opposite wall the very moment his fingertip connected with the orb. Dust and rubble rippled from the white wall -luckily not the one decorated with the painting of the Sage and his sons. Izuna groaned in both, surprise and some amount of back-pain. *That* totally left a bruise.

Hashirama’s eyes widened I horror. “I didn’t mean to”, he promised, more than a little shocked, and immediately leaped at the younger Uchiha’s side. Carefully, he tucked the orbs back into the perfect circle they had formed prior behind his back and quickly healed the forming hematoma.

Tobirama pinched the bridge of his nose. “Perhaps we should take this outside, before this place gets demolished beyond repair.” This tomb had survived centuries, no one even knew how many exactly. It wouldn’t do to have it destroyed now, due to their brothers being unable to control whatever power the Sage had gifted them with.

Thankfully, their brothers saw reason, for once. Hashirama nodded, still a little sheepish. “You’re right”, he agreed. He was starting to gain some feeling of… awareness within these orbs, though. He could *feel* the power thrumming within them, could *feel* the potential sleeping, just waiting to be awoken at the slightest command and wondered whether Madara felt the same with these new eyes of his.

One final time, Hashirama turned around, facing the white sarcophagus. Without even fully realising the movement, his fingers caressed the cool stone, gaze turning distant. He could feel some kind of mourning within himself, a sadness whose origin he couldn’t fully comprehend but now felt like a deeply rooted part of himself that had always been there but due to his ignorance, had never been noticed.

He could feel Madara’s warm palm resting supportively on his shoulder, as he withdrew his fingers and turned around. “I mourn someone I never even knew”, he murmured, making Madara squeeze his shoulder in sympathy.

Finally, the four of them made way to the exit and Hashirama blinked. “Oh”, he noted in surprise. “The gate is closed.” They hadn’t even noticed… carefully, he knocked at the door; it didn’t even make a sound. Hashirama tried once more, but still, not a single sound emerged as his knuckles connected with the red metal.

“Well”, Izuna noted. “This just bites.”

Meanwhile, Madara blinked. The gate wasn’t sealed… it just… wouldn’t open with physical power. “We’ll just need-”, he started, however; Hashirama already had a similar idea. A singe orb emerged from behind his back, floating right at the closed gate and the moment it connected, Madara grasped for the feeling of power resting within his eyes. “Push”, he

murmured and gravity seemed to shift, as the gates opened halfway, allowing the four of them to exit the tomb.

“Indra”, Kurama called out in relief, his and the Two-Tail’s giant bodies protectively curled in front of the gate. Sometime after the four humans had entered, the gates had closed and neither Kurama nor his sister had managed to open them up again. At least not without risking the entire tomb to collapse.

Madara blinked once more, his hand raising on instinct to touch the skin right underneath his eye. “It’s gone.”

Hashirama frowned. “It is”, he realised, his chocolate eyes meeting Madara’s in surprise. They were black again… just as the black orbs that had circled behind his back were gone, disappeared as though they had never existed in the first place.

“That was a short gift”, Izuna noted wryly, however; Hashirama shook his head. “I don’t think that was all about it”, he answered. It just didn’t feel right. Something was missing, just beneath the surface but he was unable to fully identify what. As though a connection hadn’t been cut but just… disappeared, leaving him with a gap unable to overcome without help, but still with the power right there, merely unreachable on his own.

Matatabi was the one to speak up again after a short pause hailing from the two clan-leaders deeply lost in thought. “Are you alright?”, she asked and finally, Hashirama seemed to focus, as usual being called into action by someone worrying about him. “We are fine”, he smiled. Then, his hands clasped together and the earth underneath them rumbled, the tomb carefully rising from the ground, lifted by massive roots. He took great care to not touch the sarcophagus and to be able to reverse everything afterwards. If he damaged the tomb, he wouldn’t be able to undo the damage, after all.

Finally, he had erected a giant wooden construct, carrying the tomb’s outer walls while the sarcophagus remained on the ground inside, the Sage’s two chairs next to it, still waiting for those dead ages ago. However; the tomb had been extended far enough to fit at least one Bijuu’s head inside, allowing them to bid their father farewell this minor way, after all those centuries. “But for now”, the Hokage smiled with his work finally done, “Please take your time. We will wait.”

Surprisingly, their departure home had been a cheery one.

The two Bijuu had been quiet, after each of them had bidden farewell to their father -this time without the Sage’s appearance. Due to that, the four humans had silently agreed to desist from telling them of their encounter with Hagoromo; it would merely risk the Tailed Beasts feeling abandoned by him. Maybe some time later, when everything had settled down… but not now.

However; after a short phase of sadness, the two of them had instead felt… relieved after being able to say their final Goodbye.

“It feels like finally being able to close this chapter”, Matatabi had told them. “Father left us without a final Goodbye and we just… never were able to come to terms with it. Sadness and anger bloom into vicious flowers once they are left to fester for centuries.”

Madara had rolled his eyes at that; by now, the giant cat sounded way too much like Hashirama. It was a little astounding, even.

Together, they had decided to reduce the tomb back into its original size and Hashirama had carefully withdrawn the wooden constructs. Then, Tobirama had marked the stone next to the gate with a teleportation-seal, thus enabling them to travel to the tomb anytime without having to take on the long journey and leaving Konoha unprotected.

Since travelling the whole way back on foot (or rather, on paws) would delay their arrival back even longer, they would use Tobirama’s Hirasishin to get back to the village. The Bijuu wouldn’t return to Konoha immediately, either, since they wanted to inform the others of the Sage’s tomb’s location. The nine of them had been connected within the deepest part of their consciousness, however; none of them had made an effort to contact each other this way for centuries. Now, they weren’t even certain it would work out if they tried.

Long story short: They had decided to split up for the time being and now Hashirama was being a depressed man-child because Matatabi wouldn’t be travelling back with them.

Madara rolled his eyes. “They won’t be gone forever, you ninny.”

Next to him, Kurama rested his large head in one of his palms. “Why don’t you scratch my ears, brother”, the Kyuubi asked, making Madara roll his eyes once more. “Do you want me to?”, he asked, making the Bijuu huff. “No, but you could’ve asked”, he declared and Tobirama supressed a sigh at the face of that much childishness. “Are we ready to go?”, he asked instead, and *finally*, his brother managed to separate from the Nibi so they could take their leave.

Teleporting all four of them -even though one at a time- all the way to Konoha proofed to be rather chakra-draining, though, since none of them were able to cast the jutsu. The younger Senju made a face, when he arrived last. “I am going to bed”, he declared, making Hashirama watch him in worry. By now, it already was later in the evening but usually, Tobirama tended to pull all-nighters more than once a week. “Do you want me to check you up?”, the Shodaime asked, making his little brother huff. “No. I just need some sleep.”

Hashirama brightened at the word and that alone was enough to raise Tobirama’s suspicions. “Care to sleep with me?”, he asked hopefully, however; before Madara could answer, Tobirama groaned. “I’ll go to your place”, he told Izuna, making the younger Uchiha grin. “Think Kuzu’ll let me sleep at his place, then?” “No”, Tobirama told him blandly, making Izuna shrug, clearly not bothered too much. “Pity”, he deemed. Then, his Mangekyou Sharingan bled to life and a moment later, him and Tobirama had disappeared into nothing but thin air.

Hashirama blinked. “What was that?”, he asked, making Madara groan. “I have no idea”, the Uchiha told him. Izuna just loved being a little shit, sometimes. Better not interpret too much into it. He looked up in surprise, as Hashirama took his hand; pale skin in tanned brown.

“Let’s go to bed”, the Hokage smiled, making Madara rise a brow. “I hope you don’t mean to sleep.” Hashirama chuckled in response. “Whatever you want to, love.”

Meanwhile, Izuna had made good use of the last forty-two seconds and when time finally started setting in again for Tobirama, he was bereft of his shoes and laying under a blanket in the Uchiha’s bedroom. “Was that really necessary?”, he asked, but both, his cutting tone and glare, had long lost every effect over the younger Uchiha -if there ever had been one in the first place. Izuna patted his head in fake reassurance. “Better they destroy your house, than mine”, he deemed and disappeared before Tobirama could throw something at him. Preferably a bunch of shuriken.

“Lady and Gentlemen”, Izuna cried out in fake cheer. “I present you… each other!”

Unimpressed, the two shinobi on the other side of the large room looked up. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mito-san”, Tobirama finally answered, while Kakuzu crossed his arms. Two scrolls were rolled out in front of him, one absolutely covered in kanji, the other barely touched with just a single complicated drawing on it.

Since Tobirama and Izuna both had slept in the Uchiha clanheads’ house, they had decided to spend the day in the lab. All of them hadn’t scheduled any business today, since they hadn’t been certain how long they would be gone for travel. When Tobirama had made his way to inform Kakuzu about their return and their plans for today, Izuna had claimed to join shortly after, since he had had some *brilliant* idea. Next time, Tobirama would ask him to specify his brain-childs, before all of Konoha joined them within this secret-for-a-reason laboratory.

Meanwhile Mito looked around within the room that clearly was a laboratory of sorts. In a shelf, dozens of bottles and tinctures were carefully lined, right next to a large storage reck full of scrolls in different sizes. A large cupboard stood on another wall, but it was closed, making her unable to determine what was inside. She could even feel some rather powerful seals, probably containing access to even further research on the wall next to it. Two desks, one of them overflowing with papers, three chairs, one with a cushion. Someone had even put down a tatami mat and two futon, as well as a few more cushions in a corner in case one of them wanted (or needed) to spend the night in here. A cup still half full of coffee stood on one desk, probably Tobirama’s. A large mirror covered most of one wall for whatever reason and someone had written seal formula on its lower half, because why the fuck not.

Mito pursed her red lips. “This place is awesome.”

Izuna grinned smugly. “Told you”, he answered, before turning to his partners in not-quite-crime (little to no doubt it would be, some point in the future). “Thing is”, he started. “As we all know, I’m a little handicapped because the most I’m able to do is forty-seven seconds and it fucking sucks. And then I asked Mito over here, whether it’s possible to seal an applied dōjutsu. And guess what? She said-” “It might be”, Mito finished for him. “So, here I am.”

“You want to seal the time-skip to see if you can lengthen it”, Kakuzu realised, making Tobirama watch him, speculating. “If we are able to seal it, we might be able to enlengthen the time-limit by summoning more than one skip”, he pondered, making Izuna grin wildly.

Tobirama was good with seals, yes. Better than anyone else had been in Konoha… but he was no Uzumaki. And if Uzumaki were known for one thing, it was their fūinjutsu. Well, that and their tomato-hair.

“Let’s see then, what the famed Uchiha, Senju and Uzumaki are able to, once they work together”, Kakuzu deemed, making Izuna pat him on the shoulder, the notion even weirder considering the masked shinobi was a full head taller than him. “Don’t sell yourself short, Kuzu. You know, you could totally become an Uchiha, inter-clan marriage isn’t forbidden…”

“No, thank you.”

“Madara…”

“… no.”

“Wake up, love”, Hashirama murmured, softly kissing the Uchiha’s cheek. “The sun is already up.”

“… then go outside and do some photosynthesis.” Madara curled up tighter under the covers, using his hair to protect his eyes from the sunrays wanting to force him into full consciousness. The blanket got tangled between his feet and he kicked a leg to get it free, however, was punished with a piercing pain that had him flinching violently and hiss in discomfort. Now he *was* awake, fucking great.

Hashirama had bowed over him, features twisted in worry. “What is it?”, he asked, making Madara open his eyes in annoyance. “Can’t think of it, moron?”, he gave back and finally, Hashirama got the message and his eyes widened. They had had sex twice, before falling asleep, and just as the last time, Hashirama had found himself unable to fight the instinctual desire of his Mokuton; wooden hands and vines had caressed the Uchiha’s body and the second time, one had joined his own erection in the right, hot heat. He shouldn’t have… he should have realised it had been too much, he should have stopped himself…

Groaning, Madara turned around. So much for sleeping in. “Stop it.”

Finally, Hashirama reluctantly met his gaze. “But I-”

“If I remember right, I was pretty agreeable with it”, the Uchiha told him, finally sitting up, the blanket sliding down to reveal collarbones covered in love bites. Fingers covered in green chakra, Hashirama instinctively reached out to tend to the bruises, however; was stopped as Madara glared at him. “Don’t you dare.” Hashirama faltered. “But-” “Fuck off”, the Uchiha snapped at him, grabbing a kimono to get dressed. “I wanted to sleep in, but you ruined it. Now go, make yourself useful, Senju.”

With that, he got up, licking his lips at the sweetest stinging pain in his lower body.

Life was good.

Chapter End Notes

If Madara gets off on the taste of his own blood in battle, he totally has a kink for after-sex-pains. Fight me.

Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

In which Madara throws a fit. But that's okay, he's got a temper.

Chapter Notes

pokes head out of rabbit-hole
Guess who got lost in the Death Note fandom... it's been years and I still love it as much as ever.
I'll admit, though, that I always skip straight to the last manga chapter and/or episode after a certain someone's death... without him, there just is no pull for me, anymore. I never watched the episodes or chapters following his death and I don't intend to.

But well, back to another dude with a serious god-complex and way too much power. Fortunately, he doesn't take the evil route in this AU.

“No.”

“But-”

“No!”

“But Madara-”

“Over my dead body!”

Hashirama’s head drooped as a small, sad cloud rained above him. “I wouldn’t want that…”, he lamented, making Madara point his finger on the two figures sitting at the other side of the large room. “You better also wouldn’t want *those* to join the village!”, he spat, making *those* narrow their lavender eyes at the Uchiha leader.

It hadn’t even been three days since the Hokage and his fellowship had returned from their quest of finding the Sage’s grave and if one asked Kakuzu (which Tobirama had done and hadn’t even been surprised with the answer) the two days during their absence had been fucking hell. Money, missions, preparations, files to be filled, endless amounts of paperwork… Everyone had wanted *something* and apparently, they had been unable to wait two days until four out of the five people running business had returned.

And since apparently, that hadn't quite been enough, another clan had delivered message about wishing to join the village. Hashirama had been -rather unsurprisingly- ecstatic. However; when he had run off to tell Madara, the Uchiha had told him to "Kindly fuck off; this is still a work-free day". Afterwards, Hashirama had sadly skulked off, leaving the raven to the nap he had been woken from.

Unfortunately, the whole incident resulted in Madara's (and in consequence Izuna's) ignorance about the clan in question being the Hyuuga.

Nara Teruki, clan-head of the Nara, lazily lifted one of his eyebrows. "He didn't even make such a fuss when the Uzumaki joined, even though that included the possibility of future war with Uzushiogakure."

"This is the first veto we ever had considering another clan joining the village", Yamanaka Ichigo noted. Even he was surprised by the vehemence of the Uchiha leader's reaction. If any clan-head had objections about another shinobi-clan joining the village, matters would be put on halt until every clanhead agreed… and Ichigo wasn't illusory; he was very aware the only clan with influence comparable to the Uchiha within Konoha were the Senju. And if Uchiha Madara vetoed, Senju Hashirama wouldn't omit his decision. Firstly, because it wouldn't go well with the village structures. And secondly… well, he wouldn't want to spend the night alone. Or rather, the rest of the month. Uchiha were known to hold grudges, after all.

By now, Madara had gotten up from his seat, arms crossed, as he stared down the two Hyuuga sitting motionlessly on the other side of the gathering room. Tobirama twitched at him from across the room. "I am aware Uchiha and Hyuuga always had a certain… competitiveness considering their dōjutsu, but don't you think this is ridicules?" Even for Madara's standards, which was saying something.

The Uchiha leader ripped his gaze from the two Hyuuga, before turning around and facing Tobirama. "I refuse to allow a clanhead enslaving his own people to join a village raised for freedom and equality", the raven spat.

His last word marked silence, as all six of Konoha's clan-leaders stared at him in equal shock. Uzumaki Mito's expression was unreadable. While she was in no regards official clanhead of the Uzumaki, those of them who had taken refuge in Konoha -and by now called it their home- considered her their leader. Tobirama had been rather surprised by Izuna's thoughtful idea of including her into the head-gathering. Since she wasn't an official clanhead, she had decided to join without an advisor, making her the only single person amongst them.

Hyuuga Homashi, leader of his clan, watched the Uchiha clanhead out of narrowed lavender eyes. "I fail to see the reason for your accusations", he answered, making Madara rise his slender eyebrows in mock-surprise. "It would be rude of me not to remind you, then", the Uchiha answered mockingly friendly. "Even though Uchiha and Hyuuga didn't clash too often, you might remember that one time… rather unfavourable, since it was the middle of winter." Madara hadn't been clanhead for that long yet back then and things had been… harsh, that particular winter, with their food supply running dangerously low. Anyway… "Hyuuga are particularly hard to put under Gen-Jutsu, considering their Byakugan-capabilities, as you well know. However; forcing to relive memories is a technique even

affecting those of your clan. Let me make this short, since I do not wish to overtax your brain-capacity."

By now, the raven's voice had turned toxic, each word dripping with acid. "This kunoichi's most cruel memory was the trauma she rooted at age six, when she received a seal due to unfortunately not being born into what others considered the main-family." The Uchiha cocked his head aside. "Second was the unbearable pain after *daring* to question the clan-head's battle-decisions a few years later. Third was the realisation that neither body nor life were hers to command any longer."

Homashi's eyes had hardened during Madara's speech. "The inner structure of our clan is of no business to you", he answered coolly.

"It is every clanhead's sacred duty to protect their clan!!"

It had been a while since any of them had head Uchiha Madara yell. Truly yell in nothing but anger, as his quarrels with Hashirama had always been different, carrying a certain amount of amusement and good nature. Fittingly, it was the Senju's warm palm on his shoulder now, that calmed his anger. His Sharingan retreated and his grit teeth opened, however; the Hokage's soft murmur of "Please, calm your chakra" was nevertheless answered with "Don't tell me what to do, asshole."

Hashirama couldn't supress a smile upon his lover's rather expected reprimand, before turning his attention back to the two Hyuuga. "Without invariable agreement, I cannot invite another clan to join the village. However; I would be grateful for an explanation… if we fully understand the issue, we might come up with a solution befitting all of us", he offered, making the other leaders turn to Homashi, as well. While Madara obviously had gained access to some sensitive information, the rest of them were still left in the dark about what specifically upset the raven.

For a few moments, Homashi kept quiet, before obviously coming to the conclusion that without giving away the required information, no clanhead would approve their joining. Besides; Uchiha Madara already was aware and certainly would be asked about it right after this meeting. Therefore, refusing to reveal his clan's hierarchic main-structure was rather useless. "It is tradition amongst the Hyuuga-clan's leaders", he therefore answered, "To seal their younger childrens' Byakugan, in order to ensure their loyalty to clan's the main-branch. Should the siblings in question attempt to disrespect leadership-" "Their fucking brains get fried", Madara snarled, his temper rising again.

Hashirama blinked. "You seal… your own clanmates?", he asked, his voice rising in disbelief. "But… what about your brothers -if you have any, that is?"

"Their uttermost duty is to protect the clan's main-branch", Homashi repeated. "There is no place for rivalry considering clan-leadership within our clan; my siblings are aware of that."

The Hokage blinked once more, seeming nearly… helpless in his inability to comprehend, as he asked: "You… sealed your own brothers…?" "Our father did", the Hyuuga clanhead corrected, however; Hashirama didn't seem to listen anymore, as his gaze got dazed, his mind no doubt carrying him far away. "I… couldn't protect my little brothers", the Kami no

Shinobi murmured. “Kuwarama and Itama, they… I would have done everything to protect them. But I could never… how could I ever…” His voice faded and his eyes were lost in memories of brothers dead long since, when even the God of Shinobi had been but a child; too weak to protect those dearest to him.

“Anija.” Ironically, it was Tobirama’s voice grounding him, and finally, the Hokage’s focus shifted back to the present, his gaze sharpening.

“I am afraid I can neither agree with your traditions as a clan-head, nor allow them to be practised within our village as Hokage.” His answer was a sad one, tone troubled by the idea of his own younger brothers’ fate, if they had been born into a different clan. “I wish I could”, he offered. However, not under these circumstances.

“The Yamanaka have studied the mind for generations.” Ichigo finally decided to cut in, even though the decision was already finale, considering the two founding clans objected. But that didn’t mean he wouldn’t offer his own decision, as well. “The consequence of psychological trauma is not fully comprehensible even to us, however; such enormous interferes certainly leave permanent psychological damage. I cannot support such measures; especially amongst members of our village. Therefore, I object, at least until we have found a compromise considering this matter.”

Next to him, the Nara clanhead nodded in agreement. “A clan-leader is selected due to his or her capability and not by oppressing other worthy candidates”, he noted. “It is a clanhead’s duty to protect their clan; not the other way around.”

“I never got why the Hyuuga were all concerned about people wanting to be one of them for their stupid Byakugan”, Izuna muttered, crossing his arms. “I am so glad I am an Uchiha. And holy shit, I am even more glad not to be one of you.”

“Don’t worry, nobody would notice if your brain got fried, anyway”, Kakuzu huffed, speaking up for the first time within this meeting. He was no clan-head but considering his overall involvement with the village’s leadership, Tobirama had concluded including him to the gatherings seemed only logical. Besides they couldn’t help but notice not having him partake would certainly leave the assassin dispraised, especially considering Mito was involved, as well, by now. Unfortunately, nobody asked Kakuzu beforehand, since the masked shinobi would much rather be taking a nap than dealing with this melodramatic matter.

The younger Uchiha blinked. “Did you just diss me?”, he complained, making Mito hum. “And since when is that considered news?”, she asked, her hands carefully hidden in her wide sleeves.

Tobirama pinched the bridge of his nose. “Could you stop fucking around for five seconds?”, the younger Senju hissed. “We have a matter to solve.” He couldn’t even put into words how humiliating this whole affair was. Why did the few people outside his clan he had come to fully trust within this village -aside from Madara, but that was Hashirama’s responsibility- have to be diplomatically inept?

Finally ending Tobirama's suffering, Izuna shrugged. "I kind of feel like we *did* settle it", he answered. "As long as the Hyuuga are a bunch of narcistic, power-seeking dictators who seal they own family into slavery, it'll be a cold day in hell before any of them joins the village."

Hashirama nodded, his face bearing an uncharacteristical sadness. "This, unfortunately, is true", he deemed. The idea of sealing his own family, his own brothers… *Tobirama*, punished for merely disagreement… his eyes saddened even further, and the very essence of life itself seemed to mourn alongside him. "Homashi-san." Next to him, Madara huffed. He knew that voice… that tone. Whereas he himself reacted with anger and fury, the Hokage would react with what he did best: empathy. "I am in no position to command or force you-" Madara barked a laugh. Oh, Hashirama could. He just didn't want to because he was kind. Because he was loving… unlike *someone* else inside this room. "But today's revealing deeply pains me. I have lost all brothers but one… and I would gladly give my life for Tobirama, if it ever came to it. Such as I know Madara would do for his own younger brother. Traditions certainly have their cause… however; I would be overjoyed if you were to overcome those of your clan and allow me to welcome the Hyuuga within Konoha. Be assured, I would do so with open arms."

The room was far too silent, far too long. Madara, still busy disdainfully staring at the two Hyuuga in front of him, wasn't even surprised that Hashirama even under these circumstances felt the need to be the do-gooder he was. Ichigo watched all of them, his crystal blue eyes not showing any further emotion and just before Hashirama would have sighed gravely and offering the two Hyuuga to walk them to the gates, Homashi spoke up. "Even if we did consider abandoning one of our clan's greatest traditions, we would be unable to fulfil your demands, Hokage-san", he answered, his voice not betraying whether he was relieved or sorry about it. "Our seals, once activated, are impossible to lift."

"Oh, boy." That was Izuna again, and one day, Tobirama would find a way to strange the little shit, his Mangekyou Sharingan ability be damned. "He does realise there's a whole bunch of Uzumaki here?"

Finally, Homashi's piercing lavender eyes narrowed at him. "Uchiha-san", he started, however; before Izuna was able to answer, the Hyuuga clanhead continued. "I would appreciate for you to cease your younger brother's drivel."

Izuna blinked. Homashi was still staring at him, but had talked to Madara instead? What kind of bullshit was that?

For one moment, the room was eerily silent. Tobirama supressed the stream of rather crude curses wanting to escape him and Hashirama was a useless lump, still baffled with the turn this situation had taken.

And then, Hyuuga Homashi crashed backwards into the wall behind him, rumble and dust raining on him as his body impacted just hard enough to not fully punch through it.

"You fucking peace of filth!" Shivering in rage, Madara stared at the Hyuuga clanhead, who hadn't even been able to react… since there had been nothing to see in advance. The Uchiha hadn't moved even as much as an inch from his Kage's side. How did he- "Madara."

Hashirama's voice was calm and he once more softly lowered a warm palm on the raven's shoulder. "Stop this."

"I don't even know what *this* is, you dolt", the Uchiha huffed. Then, he finally teared his gaze away from Homashi, purple ringed eyes meeting Hashirama's chocolate brown ones. "They seem like… shadows", Hashirama hummed. "How do you control them?" There were four of them… perfect replicas of Madara, and even he himself was unable to fully see them. However; he was able to sense them, and thus to precisely locate each one within the room - the one having kicked Homashi-san was still standing at the very spot it had acted on.

Madara rolled his eyes, the notion seemed strange due to their pattern. "I have no idea. How do you see them?"

The Hokage chuckled. "I have no idea", he parroted, before turning serious once more. "I am terribly sorry, Homashi-san", he offered honestly. "That was uncalled for."

"It was not and you know it", Madara answered, his arms crossed. Then, he blinked, and as suddenly as they had appeared, his Rinnegan were replaced by two pitch-black irises, as the dōjutsu simply disappeared, as though it had never flickered to life in the first place, taking the four shadows with it.

"You know, they could help with the paperwork", Hashirama suggested, making his lover twitch. "Even if I could, I wouldn't use the Rinnegan's Limbo to do the paperwork *you* avoid on a daily basis. Just use a wood-clone!"

The Hokage pouted at his lover's merciless attitude. "I tried", he lamented. "But he hated it just as much… and then we played cards with Tōka, instead, and *both* of us lost!"

Madara's twitching got worse and Tobirama probably wasn't off much better. One of these days he would have to check whether Hashirama actually had a brain inside that thick head of his, or just a piece of wood, halfway eaten by termites.

"I can't believe we let you run this village", the Uchiha groaned, hiding half of his face with his palms. "I didn't even want to", Hashirama protested, however; his words fell on deaf ears -at least considering the Uchiha leader, since finally, Tobirama cut in. "Would you stop bickering for two minutes", the albino bellowed, finally running out of patience and pointedly ignoring Izuna cackling madly next to him. "You're equally useless!"

As though being beating with a brick from behind, Hashirama's head slumped down, his overly large headdress slipping down in the notion. Madara caught the red, fancy hat before it tumbled to the floor. The Hokage didn't even notice as he mumbled apologies.

"You have obtained the Rinnegan."

"And you finally managed to get out of that wall", Madara answered, crossing his arms as he faced Homashi once more. Unfortunately, his trip into unforgiving concrete hadn't left any harm. He wasn't even surprised Homashi had recognised the eye-pattern. The Hyuuga were the only other clan possessing dōjutsu, after all.

Akimichi Saruma, head of his clan and latest addition to the village, was the one to finally speak up and break the silence. “Do such incidents happen… regularly?”

Ichigo snorted, the notion rare for a clanhead, and even more so for the usually so very composed man himself. “You have no idea, my friend”, he answered. “Let me phrase this favourable: The Yamanaka have forgotten the definition of boredom since the day we decided to partake in this village.”

Then, his piercing blue eyes sharpened. “However, I think we have reached a dead end at this rate. We will not force the Hyuuga into giving up their traditions. However; if they wish to be part of Konohagakure, they will have to offer some kind of concessions considering our regards on the matter. Return to your clan, Homashi-san, and consider our offer -or do not, if you don’t wish to. As soon as you have come to a conclusion, notify us and we will gather once more. The Hyuuga are more than welcome… as a clan of free people.”

Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

At this rate, is anyone even surprised anymore?

Chapter Notes

It's 2:30 am and this chapter is way too short, but I finally wanted to offer you something since it's been a month!
But Hey, the plot's finally going somewhere... slowly. Somewhen. I actually wanted to gift the two dorks a break after all that Hagoromo-stuff but somehow, that didn't work out...

The biggest thanks in history of my fanfic-thanks goes to lovely Ashlyne_M who offered to beta-read the story from the beginning! Thanks to her I'll be hopefully be able to post a much neater version of this at some point. Thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Rinnegan!

All the way across Fire-Country, Zetsu felt his whole, artificial body seize as the feeling of unlimited visual power flicked to life, outshining every single Sharingan, every single visual ability in its path.

The Rinnegan had awoken… but he wasn't ready yet! There were still pieces missing, they still hadn't finished their plans. However; the sacred eyes' power was still unstable, still raw. He doubted their wielder was able to fully control their potential already… and minutes later, the Rinnegan's presence vanished, as though it had never existed in the first place. But it scarcely mattered. The eyes had been awoken… and he had to act upon it.

However; he would have to hurry up. The Rinnegan at its full potential would be nearly impossible to conquer in battle; the longer they waited, the higher the chances its wielder would be able to fully control the power resting within the ultimate eyes.

"I'll be coming, dear Mother", the creature hummed. "I will free you… just be a little more patient…"

“Finally, we’re able to make it”, Hashirama chattered happily, making the raven next to him roll his eyes. “We could have made it earlier, if you hadn’t forgotten your own engagement”, Madara answered, not bothering to even acknowledge the pout sprouting on his Kage’s lips. “You’re still mad about it”, Hashirama lamented unhappily, not receiving an answer. Uchiha were known to hold grudges and unfortunately, Madara wasn’t different in that regard…

Today, the two of them had finally scheduled the visit to the Academy; an appointment they had postponed so often that by now, even Madara deemed it ridiculous. Of course, the Uchiha children were familiar with Madara, as were the Senju with Hashirama -and even to a certain degree the other way around, too. However; when the other clans had joined, Hashirama had already been Hokage, alongside with every duty and honour accompanying that position… and since he was rarely to be met without Madara by his side, the Uchiha was just as sparely available for anyone not familiar with him due to intra-clan relationship.

The two clanheads entered the Academy’s entrance gate. “Where to, first?”, Hashirama asked, making Madara roll his eyes once more. They would visit the younger children first, and then make their way to the older ones. Since the village had ever grown, the Academy had, as well. They had started with merely a handful of classes, and the number of children had increased ever since. The Academy would probably have to be enlarged, if even a few more clans decided to join. They had planned for Senju and Uchiha; later on including the Yamanaka. However; they had never even dreamed of uniting this many clans. The Hyuuga especially were a large clan; if they joined, they would certainly have to increase the Academy’s teaching capabilities… but well, since Hyuuga Hamashi hadn’t contacted them again yet after their failed meeting, that wasn’t up for discussion at this point. Hashirama sincerely hoped for the Hyuuga clanhead to compromise with them. Madara frankly spoken didn’t give a single fuck. The Hyuuga were a clan of arrogant assholes and their leader was the worst. However; since he was very aware of Hashirama’s feelings on the matter, he hoped for Hamashi to re-consider… for Hashirama’s sake.

Meanwhile, the two of them had entered the Academy, making their way to the first class - six-year olds, the youngest. Only a few years ago, those children would have been forced to endure battles, already… if they even had survived this long. So many children had died within the first year of being sent to battle, both sides ruthless in their mutual hatred, not even hesitating to slay the youngest and weakest.

The children cheered happily as the door opened and the both of them entered. They were on a schedule, fifteen minutes per class, however; as soon as Hashirama went in his knees to wrap his arms around the three children who had jolted out of their chairs towards him, Madara realised that had been an illusory concept.

“Umiko, Fugura, Nishiri. Leave Hokage-sama air to breathe, would you”, the class’ teacher gently scolded. Yamanaka Chichi had been recommended as a teacher by Ichigo, specifically suitable for the youngest children, as being claimed to be both, stern and yet empathic, keeping on an eye-level with the children whenever possible. The Yamanaka claimed that would noticeably increase the teaching success, especially for young children.

Thus far, they seemed to be right.

“Now, now”, Hashirama chuckled. “If I get a hug, don’t you think Madara deserved one, as well?”, he asked, making Madara raise his hands. “I don’t think-” And just like that, he got glomped by three children, nearly sending staggering backwards and tripping over his own feet, since his legs had gotten claimed by six tiny arms. “Fucking asshole”, he muttered under his breath, making Hashirama grin at him. “I’m sorry, what was that?”

“Nothing”, the Uchiha clanhead huffed, before caressing one of the children’s heads, before ushering the three of them back to their seats.

Upon a slight wave of the Kage’s hand, two wooden chairs rose from the ground and the two of them sat down, as to not tower in front of the children. “I am really sorry to be so late”, the Hokage begun. “But this way, all of you have spent enough time here, to tell me: How do you like the Academy?”

“Yesterday we learned how to-” “Chichi-sama’s the best-” “- be as good as my sister because-” “I just wish he could be faster-”- really wanna do a summon, but-” Unable to even distinct a single sentence, Hashirama rose his hands in mock surrender. “I’ll assume you like it here, then?”, he asked, making the children yell in agreement. Chichi had already opened her mouth to chastise them -no shouting in class, especially not with Hokage-sama visiting!- however; Hashirama’s cheery laughter soon accompanied the childrens’ happy outbursts and how could she reprimand her own Kage?

Her gaze flicked to Uchiha Madara, who had yet to say something. His appearance was dark as usual in his navy-blue cloak and his black hair hiding most of his face, a strange contradiction to Senju Hashirama’s bright nature. She expected him to disapprove; after all, this was anything but proper behaviour. However; the Uchiha clanhead’s ebony eyes weren’t focussed on the mass of children in front of them, but the Hokage instead. His expression was soft, as were his eyes -or rather, the single visible one. Happy, contend with the Hokage’s joy, quite obviously valuing it way higher than the classes misbehaviour.

Finally, the children calmed and Hashirama spoke up again, still smiling. “We don’t have that much time together”, the Hokage cautioned. “But it will be enough for each of you to ask one question. Whatever you want to know, please don’t hesitate to ask but remember… only one for each of you, so think closely before asking.”

That left the children brooding and some of them whispered with each other, no doubt debating about their questions. However; when the first one -a girl with brunette hair, a few nuances brighter that Hashirama’s- rose her hand, the question was rather unexpected. “What does the Sharingan feel like?”, she wanted to know and Madara blinked in surprise. He hadn’t expected any of the children to ask him anything; actually, he had just agreed to accompany Hashirama due to his position as the Kage’s advisor. Now, though… His irises reddened, as his Sharingan sprung to life, making the children whisper. One of them even squealed at the sight. “Hm”, he pondered, his tomoe slowly rotating. “Why don’t you tell me?”

The young girl gasped, as her own eyes seemed to spin in red. Then, her head whirled around, as Madara’s carefully crafted gen-jutsu allowed to the girl to view the world with the Sharingan’s perspective, mimicking its effects -even though softened, as to not overwhelm

her. “Everything’s so slow”, she exclaimed, giggling as she caught the apple Madara threw at her, shamelessly stolen from Hashirama’s pocket.

His eyes were soft, Hashirama couldn’t help but notice, and he felt his own expression shift in response, as Madara’s genjutsu allowed the child to experience the Sharingan for another few moments, before retreating. However; the girl didn’t even seem downcast; still happily giggling about her experience.

As expected, their visit to the First Years took longer than the scheduled fifteen minutes.

As did their visits on every class after, until they finally had made it to the last one. These children had already been forced to fight, already knew the battlefield. Neither of them were truly children, not anymore, as they ranked in age between eleven and twelve and all of them remembered siblings lost, family killed. They were the oldest being taught at the Academy and might graduate next year -if their skills had improved enough in both, body and mind.

Naturally, they were calmer than the younger classes and their questions asked were sharper, way more thought trough, as all of them were aware they probably wouldn’t get another chance like this.

“What does it feel like, to be the Hokage’s husband?”

For a moment, even Madara was stupefied at the red-haired boy’s (was he one of the few Uzumaki-children?) question. From the corners of his eyes, he could see the classes teacher flinch at the inappropriate question. However; the Uchiha leader merely shrugged. “I wouldn’t know, we aren’t married.”

“Why?” Another boy, Madara was rather certain he was of the Nara. Troublesome lot, all of them.

“Yes, why?”

The Uchiha leader’s eyes narrowed at his Kage, who had parroted the Nara boy’s question. “Go fuck yourself.”

Hashirama shrieked rather embarrassingly. “Not in front of the kids!”

“They’ve had worse, you big baby. Now-” “You didn’t even answer the question”, the Hokage interrupted, quickly getting rid of the small flames starting to lick on his sleeves under the Uchiha’s piercing gaze.

“How old are you”, Madara demanded from his Kage. “Five?”

“I already asked you and you said No”, Hashirama reminded him, oblivious to the shocked stares that statement got him -even by the teacher, a Sarutobi in his mid-forties.

Madara, not being much better at recognising public appal, rolled his eyes. “We just had had sex, Hashirama. It’s rather normal to be too emotional afterwards, especially for you. You

didn't think it over and just let your emotions get the better of you, like always." Hashirama opened his mouth, however; before he could start talking, was interrupted by his unruly Uchiha. "If you even think about asking again right now, I'll kick your teeth in." Not that that would accomplish much, they'd probably just regrow.

"You're difficult to love", the God of Shinobi pouted, making Madara roll his eyes at his theatrics. Then, he turned back to class again. It was just a few children more, then each of them would have gotten to ask their question and Madara could finally get back home and have a nice, long afternoon-nap in the sun (this time, hopefully without getting another sunburn).

"Did you refuse because you're worried Hokage-sama and you won't be able to have children?"

Madara supressed a growl. Seriously; it was time to get out of here, these pre-teenagers got *way* too nosy and the current topic of discussion wasn't helping, either. However; they had promised to answer -at least as long as the questions weren't of security-concern- and he intended to keep his word. "My refusal had nothing to do with that", he denied. The time when traditions and expectations had ruled his life were long over and done with. However; before the next student was able to ask their question, Hashirama happily piped in. "Besides, that won't be much of a problem. I talked to Mito and she agreed to-"

"You talked to Mito about having children", Madara repeated, making Hashirama nod. "Yes, well since we won't be able to, I asked her, because-"

"You asked Uzumaki Mito, your ex-fiancée, to have children with you", the Uchiha clarified and his lover blinked. "Yes, but-"

He didn't get to finish his sentence, as he could feel one of his ribs -left side, fifth one from below- crack under the Madara's heel, as his body crashed through two walls -luckily, they were rather thick even within the Academy, but the Uchiha's kick had been sharp.

His body punched through the room, the wall, across the floor, right through the next wall, before his Mokuton finally ceased his path, stopping him in the Academy's inner courtyard. They had included a small training field for the children here, a place for exercise and demonstration.

However; that was rather unimportant right now, he decided, as he picked himself up from vines that had caught him. Madara was stalking at him; his chakra boiling in rage. "You fucking piece of filth!" Hands balled into fists, the Uchiha slowly made his way across the path of destruction the Kage's body had forced into the building.

Not again…

"Madara-" "I'm going to tear your fucking face off", the Uchiha snarled, his eyes swirling red in rage. "And then every single one of those fingers you *dared* touching me with!"

"Madara, please, I just-" Hashirama leaped aside, as the Uchiha's flame covered first crashed into the ground he had just stood on, bursting the earth underneath. "I just wanted to-" This

time, he evaded his lover's kick, as to not crash into the Academy building once again. "Madara!"

By now, the children had gathered at their classroom windows, chattering happily about the physical demonstration the Hokage and Madara-sama were giving for the end of their visit. "They're *so* fast!", an eight-year old exclaimed, making the rest of his class nod in agreement.

"You think they studied that?"

"They don't need to; they're so good, I bet they improvise!"

"It must be so cool, being married to the strongest shinobi in the village!"

"Do you think Hokage-sama trains a lot, too?"

"I still think Madara-sama's stronger. Did you see that? He's so fast, Hokage-sama won't even get to him!"

"Don't be stupid; if Madara-sama were stronger, *he* would be Hokage!"

"Nu-hu, he just didn't want to and then Hashirama-sama became Hokage instead!"

"Yeah, that's what my Dad told me, too!"

Unfortunately, the village leaders' demonstration got interrupted soon after, as Tobirama-sama appeared at the Academy's inner yard.

An Uchiha girl giggled. "I can see his eyebrow twitching! I bet they didn't tell him about their fight today!"

"I don't see anything", a Yamanaka boy lamented, making a Nara roll her eyes. "That's because Uchiha-eyes are better, even if they haven't awoken the Sharingan yet."

Summoning a quick Suiton to get rid of the flames that had started licking on some of the bushes decorating the yard, Tobirama seethed at the two clanheads in front of him. "What do you think you're doing?!" Izuna and him had left their brothers alone for one forenoon to tend to the kids and *this* happened?!

"We fucked and afterwards you remembered you had a fiancée you never even told me about, because she appeared right at the main-gates. I fucking forgave you and now you tell me you want to have children with her", Madara bellowed, still would tight as a bowstring and apparently not caring at all about the younger Senju's arrival. "This is the second time you stab me in the back, Hashirama, and I don't do third chances!" He actually didn't even do second ones, but the treacherous bastard had convinced him… as he always did. Ever since they had been children, even if Madara should have known better.

"Betray me once, shame on you. Betray me twice, shame on me for letting you", the Uchiha leader muttered, making Hashirama break out of his stupor. "I would never betray you", he

swore. Madara's temper had calmed, however; that only worried Hashirama further. Under these circumstances, calm anger was so much worse than open fury.

Well, it always was if it came to Madara, if he was being honest. He would rather be punched through the village than having the Uchiha go into that state of mind.

"I'm going home", the raven stated, making Hashirama peak up. "I'll come with you. Please, I didn't-"

"I want to be alone, Hashirama. This isn't working."

What?

Chapter End Notes

Is your school just as awesome?
I don't think so.

Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Mito deserves a prize, Tobirama's a good bro, Izuna's pissed and Kakuzu just doesn't give a crap.

Chapter Notes

It's just been a week. I'm scaring myself here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He didn’t tell him? What do you mean, he didn’t tell him?”

“He didn’t tell him, obviously!”

With a rather painful sounding *Bang*, Tobirama’s forehead connected with the cupboard, making a few pieces of paper entirely covered with experimental summoning- and fūinjutsu formula tumble to the ground from where they had messily been taped to its doors. “Please, tell me you’re shitting with me. Not even *he* can be that much of an idiot.”

From the other side of their lab, Kakuzu lifted a dark brow. “You *do* realise whom we are talking about?”, he drawled, making Tobirama groan into the wood, before finally lifting his face and turning around.

Izuna leaned on one of the two desks, arms crossed and lips thinned into an unhappy line. Obviously, the only other person previously knowing about Hashirama’s… did it even deserve to be called a brainchild… was Mito, who was sitting onto the second desk, legs elegantly crossed at the ankles. Her hair was kept up in a simple ponytail, since the sealing tags she normally used to decorate her buns had previously gotten affected during experimentation and nearly blown her head off. They had experimented about the possibility of releasing explosive tags and directly sending them into a time-skip, as to have them explode immediately at a later moment without having to be activated again and somehow, things had gone rough. Kakuzu, for some reason, had found the incident rather hilarious. Probably since he himself didn’t give a fuck about his appearance and would just sew whatever parts of him got torn off right back on.

Mito shook her head. “I should have asked him but how could I know he’d talk to me about it, without even mentioning the issue with his own husband?”

Izuna blinked at that. “They’re not married.”

The Uzumaki glanced at him, obviously surprised. “Oh… I actually thought…”

“Hashirama even asked him”, Tobirama huffed. “And Madara told him off. He kept whining about it all day, until *I* told him off, as well.” Probably after that, too, but that hadn’t been Tobirama’s problem anymore. “How is Madara coping?”, he then decided to add. After all, the whole incident had been his older brother’s fault, making him feel at least partly responsible.

Izuna sighed. “Just don’t fuck with him right now”, he advised, making Tobirama roll his eyes. Even on a good day, it was a remarkably bad idea to cross Uchiha Madara. Now, however, it would probably prove to be right-out suicidal.

“If this gets even worse, I’ll be moving out again”, Kakuzu muttered, making Izuna roll his eyes at the assassin’s dramatics. “Fuck off, you’re stuck with us. Anyway”, he then decided to change topics -if he talked any longer about their older brothers’ latest quarrel, he’d pop a blood vessel or two- and turned to Mito. “How’s the second layer doing?”

The Uzumaki hummed in response. “The seal-formula are finished, but I need to find a possibility to add them and connect the layers. I’ll need more samples.”

Izuna nodded at that and Tobirama spoke up again. “I found a way to string the jutsu together.” He drew a scroll from… somewhere, unrolling it and exposing a complicated pattern of formula. “Releasing the first seal will start an internal countdown, leading to the next added seal being released, as well, after forty seconds. The chain-reaction will keep going, until it’s either paused by the seal-wielder, or every added seal is released.”

Kakuzu’s mask moved, meaning the assassin grimaced. “The main issue remains: If we cannot figure out how to add different seals and connect them” -and Mito would probably be the only one being able to figure that part out- “We can’t connect the time-skips.”

Izuna grinned. “You’re too pessimistic, Kuzu. We’ve made it this far, we’ll get the rest done, too.” He took the scroll Mito handed him, unrolling it on the desk, before flickering the Mangekyou Sharingan to life, his irises bleeding in red. The sealing formula glimmered red and seemed surprisingly simple -which merely underlined the irony of Mito having needed weeks to develop it.

Unceremoniously, the Uchiha called his eyes’ ability to life, as to cast the piece of paper ahead in time. They had decided on forty-second intervals, since first, that was the amount of time Izuna was able to summon rather effortlessly (everything more took an exponentially rising sum of both, concentration and chakra by the second). And besides… it was easier to do the maths with an even number.

Instead of disappearing, the seal’s glow intensified, until it matched the Sharingan’s own deep red, the pattern swirling once, rather similar to his own irises.

And just like that, his dōjutsu was sealed. Forty seconds of a time-skip, perfectly ready to be used whenever the seal got released on whatever item -or person- it was aimed at.

He prepared three more seals before his Sharingan retreated and leaned back in his chair (it was his because he had been the only one thoughtful enough push it with fox-fur and he'd defend it). "Maybe you should keep one of them. Just in case you'd ever need it…"

Kakuzu rolled his two-coloured eyes. "None of us can act within the skip, except you. They'll be useless to us. We might aim them at an enemy, yes, but only at one at a time. Besides, who would be able to defeat us in battle, anyway?" Except for the Hokage and his… boyfriend/ lover/ not-quite-husband. But since that basically went for any living thing on the continent and probably the planet, that wasn't an actual limitation.

Izuna grinned. "Even if you'd get stabbed, you'll still have four hearts more to go." Then, his lashes flattered exaggeratingly. "And there's not a teeny-tiny peek in one of them, beating for me?"

The assassin crossed his arms. "If we ever get this done, I'll consider fucking your brains out to celebrate", he deemed, and this time, Mito rolled her eyes. Izuna hitting on Kakuzu was a pattern she had early on figured out had way less (meaning: absolutely nothing) to do with unrequited love and way more with the simple fact the assassin told him off each and every time, which in turn made Izuna just get even more stubborn about the matter. She wondered whether the Uchiha would start attempting to get into Tobirama's pants, after he had finally gotten his way with the masked assassin. Or worse… hers.

Her rather embarrassingly loud growling stomach reminded the four of them that they had spent the whole afternoon in their lab (at this point calling it Tobirama's alone just didn't fit anymore, even though he had been the one to have it built). They were way after dinnertime already, Tobirama noted, as they sealed their scrolls and papers back into place, taking special care with the seals containing Izuna's time-skips.

Once Mito's formula had proven to work and been able to seal the applied dōjutsu, they had decided taking the seals out of the lab would be too dangerous… and afterwards noted, that conclusion complied to basically all of their other experiments and results, as well. All of their work was to be left in the lab, contained by ridiculous extensive amounts of security devices.

"Tomorrow?", Mito asked, making Izuna shake his head. "I need to prepare an intra-clan issue and I'll probably run it, since I doubt Aniki will have the patience", he explained. "How about Tuesday?"

Kakuzu grinned underneath his mask. "Just for the records, we actually *could* work by ourselves down here." But well… they just never did. First, it had always been the three of them, now four. It took every single one of them to tap their full potential.

Tobirama's inventive genius to create the Hirasishin.

Izuna's eyes to cast a dōjutsu powerful enough to cross time.

Mito's fūinjutsu-mastery to invent a seal able to contain the time-skip.

And then, Kakuzu's expertise at body-modification to be able to survive the combination of all three.

Somehow, it just felt pointless to work on their research without all of them united, Tobirama decided, as he made his way back home. Besides, he still had enough on his schedule to fill the day with, other than experimenting the ever-lasting shit out of what could easily be a devastating combination of fūin-, summoning- and dōjutsu. The office kept an unlimited supply of paperwork, after all.

The characteristic smell of alcohol hit his nostrils, as soon as he had opened the front-door to his and Hashirama's house, making him frown. "Anija?"

Quickly, he got out of his shoes and made his way across the house, straight to the living-room, where the heavy smell hailed from. An empty sake-bottle rolled into his general direction as he entered the room and at least a dozen more covered the floor, two more on the table… and his mess of an older brother sitting in the corner, hugging a pillow as though the world was about to end.

"What exactly are you trying to accomplish?", Tobirama asked, making Hashirama look up. "Tried to get drunk", the God of Shinobi answered gloomily. "But I apparently can't even manage that, and now we don't have any more bottles."

Tobirama felt his eyebrow twitch. "You drowned sixteen bottles of sake?"

"Eighteen", his older brother corrected low-spirited. "I bought two more on my way home." Not that it made any difference… he had emptied five bottles, one right after the other and the only effect had been a rather unpleasant prickling in his fingers for about twenty seconds. The only lasting result had been becoming even more downcast.

For another moment, Tobirama watched his brother, the mighty Hokage, sit on the floor, with his knees drawn to his chest, hugging a pillow. "You do realise, this whole mess is partially your fault?" Well, actually it *totally* was bis brother's fault, but not even he wanted to kick a man already drowning in misery.

Hashirama sighed silently, hugging his pillow even closer as if attempting to compensate for a certain Uchiha he would much rather squish right now. "We were just talking! I didn't even think-" "You never do, that's the problem", Tobirama interrupted. "Did you talk to Madara about it?"

"Tried to, got kicked out by Izuna before I could even enter", his older brother answered sadly. That explained the younger Uchiha's terrible mood at the beginning of their meeting today, Tobirama noted.

Hashirama's bonsai next to the closed door leading to their (or rather his brother's) opulent garden wilted in response to its master's sadness, its leaves and twigs drooping. The garden probably wouldn't be in a better shape, Tobirama suspected.

With another sigh, he wordlessly sat next to Hashirama, leaning on the wall and stretching out his legs. "He'll calm down", he told Hashirama. "He always does."

Uchiha Madara didn't have many weak spots, but Tobirama was very aware his brother was one of them. There was very little Madara wouldn't be willing to do for Hashirama, even though he was rather skilled in hiding it. Besides, there were very few people around, who knew Hashirama better than Madara -in fact, he could only think of one and that was he himself as Hashirama's last remaining brother.

When he opened the door, Madara wasn't even surprised to find Uzumaki Mito standing outside. Izuna had left half an hour ago, claiming he had to prepare tomorrow's clan-discussion (what a coincidence). And the visitor couldn't have been Hashirama, either, since the stupid Senju didn't just stick to knocking twice like normal people but instead nearly banged down his door. Tobirama, on the other hand, probably wouldn't even bother knocking.

"We need to talk", the Uzumaki told him, making him step aside. "Come in, then", he told her. "I'll put on some tea. Is green fitting?" She nodded, following him into the kitchen where he quickly boiled some water and poured two cups, setting one in front of Mito, who had taken a seat on the table.

"You're rather calm about it", she noted, making him chuckle as he took a seat, facing her. "You expected me to throw another fit", he stated, taking a sip of his scaling tea and coughing once in response to the hot liquid warming his insides. "I do have a temper", he then confessed freely. "Most Uchiha do, probably due to our fire-nature, but I'm not unwilling to accept I might be a little much, at times." He took another sip, enjoying the feeling of warmth drink brought with it. "My temper runs rather hot, and I rarely care to contain it. But I'm not stupid, either, Mito-san. Hashirama is many things, but unfaithful isn't one of them. Neither is cruel." The Uchiha leaned back in his chair. "However; he carries his heart on his sleeve and he tends to forget to use that mushy excuse of a brain at times. I was pissed at him, yes. Actually, I still am. But even I can't pretend Hashirama has willingly betrayed me; at least not after I followed my own advice yesterday and used my brain."

"Did you talk to him yet?", Mito asked, making Madara huff. "No. I'm still pissed", he answered, as though it should have been obvious. He poured himself some more tea as the rest of his had started to cool in his cup. Mito took her first sip, having waited until it wasn't scaling enough to burn her tongue anymore.

"You should ask him", she advised. "He might be too rash, but he loves you deeply."

Madara took another mouthful of tea. Mito obviously cared for Hashirama, but that was rather unsurprising. There was nobody in Konoha who didn't love their Hokage and his stupidly big heart. "If I ask him, it'll all be useless blabbering and apologies. Do me a favour, Mito-san. Spare me the headache and tell me. You've been there, too, after all."

For a moment, Mito was silent in surprise. Madara trusting her enough to tell her about the rather intimate conversation with his partner, especially considering he had been her fiancé not too long ago, was even more than unexpected. She took another gulp of tea. "Very well, then."

Swiftly, she secured their lab and made her way back upstairs. Izuna, Tobirama and Kakuzu had already left. She had stayed behind a little -rather uncommon, usually they left together once they were done for the day- to wrap up her last piece of work. They wouldn't be able to further develop their research, if she didn't manage her part of their work.

"Mito-san?"

She turned around, facing the Hokage, apparently being done for the day, as well. "I thought we were past that, Hashirama", she scolded gently, making him smile. "Mito", he corrected, laughing sheepishly, as his stomach growled. "I'm sorry, I was just about to grab a bite to eat. The reports have taken way longer than expected. Care to join me?"

"What about Madara?", she asked, making him pout. "He has a clan-dispute to tend to. Told me to fuck off and mind my own clan, once I offered to help… that's why I decided to go to the office."

She couldn't help but chuckle. Of course, Hashirama merely tended to paperwork because his lover had told him off. "Alright, then."

Considering they ate at a rather uncommon hour (way too early for dinner, but still too late for lunch) their order was at their table in record-time. However; Mito supposed it would've been the same if the place had been crowded, despite Hashirama's best efforts in preventing any special service due to his position.

Due to Madara currently dealing with intra-clan troubles (Hashirama didn't even know what exactly; Madara had merely been annoyed and therefore he assumed it wasn't the first time the issue arose), the topic inevitably shifted to those in their clans unwilling to accept their leaders' relationship.

"… they told us we wouldn't be able to have children!" Mito knew, she had been present, as well, but didn't stop Hashirama's complains. He probably just needed to get if off his chest and neither Tobirama nor Madara were particularly patient in that matter. He picked up one of his Takoyaki. "As if that defined our relationship. Even if we'd get children, they'd probably still complain!" He stuffed the octopus ball in his mouth. The heat burning his tongue, but within seconds it had already healed neatly.

"It is the principle of your relationship that bothers them, you not being able to have children with one another is merely an excuse", Mito agreed, taking one of her own Maki. These people didn't even know how lucky they were, having such a kind-hearted leader, always striding for the best of his clan. If her own father would only be half the clanhead Hashirama was, no Uzumaki would have even considered leaving Uzushio.

"I just don't understand, why", Hashirama muttered quietly, poking at another Takoyaki with his chopsticks. "I always imagined having children at some point, but that probably hailed in the clan's expectations… It's just sad Madara won't be able, either. He'd be a wonderful father…"

For a while, Mito left him to be lost in his thought, sorting her own out in the meantime, before coming to a decision. "Hashirama." Her voice was calm. "It is due to you and Madara, the Uzumaki have finally been able to find a home here. You could have simply sent us back to Uzushio, but instead invited us to your village, even going as far as risking war with the Whirlpool. All of us, but especially me, owe you more than we can possibly repay." Her expression turned even more serious. "I want you to know I will help in any way I can. That goes for both of you."

The Uchiha huffed, his slender eyebrow twitching. "I can't believe that fucker", he stated. "He wants me to have children? Not even *I* want me to have children!" And to talk to Mito about it, before Hashirama had even so much as *asked* him? What had the idiot been thinking?! Nothing, probably, like always. He raised his gaze, serious eyes meeting Mito's. "You do realise though, that debt of yours is none-existent, do you", he then demanded, making her smile.

"Hashirama said the same. However; I disagree", Mito stated.

"Bullshit", he denied. "Besides, I'm everything but father-material. If anyone is, it's Hashirama." His father had been the worst possible example -if he even deserved to be called such. Him and children wouldn't work. Besides, he already had his own overgrown kid sitting at home and wallowing, since he'd once more forgotten to use his brain.

Why did he have to be the mature one?!

Chapter End Notes

Comments are love, comments are life ^^

Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

In which the author had a writer's block, so half of this is porn.
I refuse to regret anything.

Chapter Notes

Does anyone remember whether Madara actually said the big L-word already? I don't and in my halfhearted search I didn't find something, either. Therefore I just decided: No, he didn't.
If he did, just pretend this is a first (and tell me where, I'll go any change it, then).

“Madara?” Carefully, Hashirama knocked on the door, his voice a little hesitating but hopeful. “Darling, please open the door?” It had been two days since Mito had told him about her visit at Madara and ever since, he had hoped the Uchiha would calm and seek him out to talk about… well, *something*, but his raven was stubborn as ever. They had even met by coincidence yesterday, as both had decided to have some take-out ramen for dinner. However; when Hashirama had attempted to apologise, a judgmentally lifted eyebrow had been all he had received before Madara payed for his food and left, Izuna standing next to him, who looked ready to either throttle someone or bang his head right against the next wall.

And well… long story short, around fifteen minutes ago, Hashirama had decided to be unable to take the silence anymore… thus, here he was. He resumed knocking. “I know you’re home, Madara.” He could easily feel the Uchiha’s chakra, even though he was no sensor. “I won’t leave until you answer the door.” He was nothing of not stubborn, after all, even though Madara could be equally pig-headed, at times. It always came down to that, Hashirama mused. One of them would have the longer breath, the other one would be giving in, eventually. Sometimes it was him… but today, it wouldn’t be! Even if he had to wait all day, he wouldn’t leave, not until Madara had given him at least a chance to- the door swung open, just barely missing his nose, revealing the Uchiha-clanhead clad in nothing but one of the simple yukata Hashirama knew he preferred for sleeping.

“Fuck off my porch, I’m still pissed!”

Before Madara was able to throw the door in his face (again), Hashirama wriggled his way inside. “I’m not on your porch anymore”, he argued, evading Madara’s twitching gaze in order to retreat to the kitchen. He took his chair -it was *his*, he always took it whenever they

were at Madara's, he wasn't willing to give it up now- and sat down, refusing the leave again, until he had at least been given a chance to explain.

"I…" He stopped for a moment, uncertain about how to continue. Then, his forehead slammed onto the table, as he bowed his head as low as possible, chestnut hair spilling around him, fingers gripping the table's edge tightly. "I truly am sorry. I hurt you and I… I didn't mean to, I didn't think…"

On the other side of the kitchen, Madara took a sip of the tea he had been nursing before the idiot had decided to ruin his peaceful lunch. "You never do", he muttered, not bothering to hide the slice of irritation tainting his voice. "Sometimes I wonder how you make me love you so much."

As soon as he had spoken the words, his mouth snapped shut, as Hashirama stared at him, his umber eyes large, staring into the Uchiha's. This was the first time he had explicitly said it. Of course, he knew, Madara had to feel something for him, it was inevitable given his actions and their overall relationship. However; actually confirming it was just… so much more. It was Everything. Everything, that mattered.

Madara unconsciously took an step back, onyx eyes too large in his slender face, still in shock of his own careless confession. "I-"

His back collided with the wall behind them, interrupting whatever he was about to say as Hashirama pressed onto him. Two large palms cupped his face, way too tender for the power both knew they were able to wield, as a hot mouth met his own, lips moving against his own, licking his lower lip. Hashirama had always run hotter than him. Madara's fire-nature tended to heat up his temper, rather than his body. He moaned into the kiss, making Hashirama use the opening and push his tongue into the Uchiha's mouth. He could feel its hot tip lick the roof of his mouth as his own fingers started clawing into the Senju's shoulders. Twines started wrapping around his ankles, climbing up to his calves in an attempt to keep him in place.

Seemingly on a whim, Hashirama pulled back, leaving Madara gasping for air and leaning against the wall, eyes closed. He could feel the Kage's hot tongue leap up the small string of salvia he had left behind on his chin after the heat of their kiss, before leaning forward and connecting their lips softly once more, ever so careful, as if to make up for the roughness.

"I love you, too", Hashirama murmured. "So much…"

Madara leaned back his head, still struggling for breath, lips parted. He coughed, his lungs burning, attempting (and failing) to make up for the lost oxygen. "Fuck off", he gasped, making the Senju smile at him as his twines and branches wrapped higher around him, refusing to let go.

"No", Hashirama chuckled in response, offering a quick peck on the raven's flushed cheek. Then, his eyes glinted mischievously. "In fact, I'd much rather do the opposite", he instead mocked, making Madara narrow his eyes at him. "Don't you da-" A pair of unyielding, yet soft arms pulled him onto the Senju's chest. "Let's go upstairs, hmm?"

“Fuck you.”

“Oh, I intend to”, Hashirama laughed and within seconds, had leaped upstairs right into Madara’s bedroom.

Ever so gently, he lowered the Uchiha onto his bed, however; merely succeeded in making Madara’s eyes narrow once more. “If you *dare* treating me like some kind useless, fragile doll, I will cut off your fingers”, he hissed, making Hashirama’s features cloud over with a particular kind of sadness. The one he never could fight against, whenever he once more was proven Madara had never had the opportunity to learn to distinguish between tenderness and pity, even though he deserved all of the first and nothing of the last.

A pointed flare of chakra activated the seals Mito had come up with for them them a while back. A total of six, on various parts of the house -three of them in the bedroom alone. This way, any chakra-spikes created within the house would stay just there, therefore relieving the two of them of having to try to control their overflowing chakra. The whole thing had been initiated by Tobirama -no surprise here-, after the two of them had “kept every sensor within the village from getting even half a night of sleep, how do you even -no, I don’t want to know!” Long story short, Mito had installed the seals in both, Madara’s house and Hashirama’s shortly after.

However; Madara currently was still busy narrowing his eyes at the Senju clanhead, apparently weighting his options about… well, if he was honest, Hashirama didn’t really know; the raven tended to be as moody as unpredictable.

Within the blink of an eye, Madara had reversed their positions, now kneeling above the Senju, his eyes glinting with a strange mix of mischief, annoyance and anger. Pale hands shoved his shoulders into the mattress and then travelled down his chest, before unceremoniously stripping him of his hakama. “Your biggest weakness is still your missing sense for fashion”, he noted, making Hashirama laugh sheepishly. Why did everyone out of his own clan (even the Nara, and those generally were too lazy to backbite) seem to either detest or amuse themselves with his choice of clothes? They were comfortable, soft and easy to handle. How was it his fault, the Uchiha preferred their dark turtlenecks, revealing absolutely nothing they didn’t necessarily have to? That had to be hell in summer!

“You’re just- *aaaaah*!” The God of Shinobi gasped for air, his argument in vain, as a hot, slick mouth surrounded his cock, making his erection fully harden within not even a moment. He forced his head up, lifting himself onto his lower arms to be able to watch the Uchiha -or rather, the parts he could make out underneath his mountain of hair.

Using only his hands to lift his upper body between the Senju’s thighs, the raven lowered his head further, allowing more of Hashirama to entrance his mouth. For now, he stuck to merely getting used to the sensation, making the Senju groan as he supressed the reflex to thrust into the willingly offered heat.

A single vine snuck onto the sheets, collecting the mass of raven hair and tying it aside, until its master was able to see the Uchiha bowing above him, head lowered and lips opened wide as to take in as much as possible, before slowly pulling back, only to sink down a moment later, deeper than before.

His mouth was hot and soft, clearly still unused to this, however; for some reason that only excited Hashirama further. It was obvious Madara had never done this before -at least not earnestly- and the idea, the knowledge of him being the first, his flesh as the first Madara tasted, his cock the first one to penetrate that unforgiving mouth… The Uchiha gagged as Hashirama thrusted deep into his mouth with a strangled groan, cutting off his air supply for a moment. When the pressure lessened, he took a deep breath, inhaling through his nose. He opened his lips even further, finally taking in the last missing piece of flesh and was once more forced to suppress the reflex to gag at the hard, unyielding cock sliding down his throat. He swallowed around the girth, tasting a slight saltiness, a particular musk and something that he by now very intimately had gotten to associate as Hashirama, pure and simple. Underneath him, he could feel Hashirama's body tense further with each passing moment, his limbs digging into the sheets as he supressed the urge to buck his hips into the willingly offered lips.

Finally gotten used to the fullness within his mouth and throat, Madara started pressing his tongue against the wrinkled, musky skin, and then retreated, until nothing but the tip remained between his lips. Hashirama didn't even notice the branches and vines that had been called to life and now wrapped around their destination. One bloomed around the Uchiha's lower arms, deep-red flowers with long thorns carefully pointing away from his skin, as if refusing to let him leave from his position between Hashirama's legs by both, choice and force.

By now, Hashirama's fingers had clawed through the sheets, ripping the fabric. However, when Madara fully released his throbbing erection to lift his gaze at Hashirama's face, he opened his eyes, watching him blearily out of umber depths. "If you continue treating me like a weak piece of porcelain, I will walk out on you right now", Madara hissed and Hashirama closed his eyes again. The raven once more mistook his sincere tenderness for disrespect… how was he supposed to- "*Madara!*" Without so much as a warning, the Uchiha had once more lowered his head, this time intaking his whole erection at once and even Hashirama couldn't supress the deeply instinctual urge to buck into the hot, willing mouth, forcing the raven's pale lips to open up even further as he slid down his throat, making him bite back another gag.

By now, even more vines had wrapped around him, however; Madara had long since gotten used to his lover's Mokuton and its effects. One of them grew even bolder, as Madara pressed his togue into the already dripping slit in his mouth. Hashirama moaned his name once again and a single vine wrapped around his throat, refusing to let Madara lift his head again, pulling him even deeper onto the hot cock.

Unbiddenly, Hashirama's fingers clawed into the mass of raven hair, pulling at the strands and Madara closed his eyes, as the Kage's semen filled his mouth, running down his throat as he swallowed the salty liquid. Right after, he released the Senju's erection from his mouth, sitting back on his heels. As usual, Hashirama was still fully aroused; a single orgasm was way too little to fully satisfy the God of Shinobi, his recovery time equalling zero in both, battle and bed. He knew from experience, it would at least two more, until Hashirama's raging life force was satisfied -at least for the moment.

Madara wiped his lower lip with the pad of his thump, dealing with the last remains of cum. He picked off the single vine still wrapped around his throat that had been caressing the pulse-point with the petals of white flowers and watched his Kage, whose breathing had already evened out.

“Now, get the fuck out of my house.”

Rather undignified, the Senju emitted a sound closely related to a squeak, his eyes popping open in shock. “W-What?”

Without further ado, Madara got up and straightened his yukata, not even bothering to help the (more than) halfway naked Hokage. He lifted a fine eyebrow. “I may have forgiven you for being an idiot…” He *had* known what he was up for, when he had agreed to this affair, after all -well, at least mostly. “But I’m still pissed. So, get out before I burn your stupid hakama and let you run across the village naked.”

Still dumbfounded, Hashirama blinked at him, his brain apparently unable to process what exactly was happening, mouth gaping like a fish wriggling on the shore. “What?”, he repeated, only to bat at the flames that started licking on his clothes. “Madara!”

The Uchiha straightened his collar, his more-than-usual ruffled hair the only proof of his activity -along with his slightly swollen lips, still a little to red, a little too glistening from the girth that had stretched them. Unbiddenly, Hashirama’s gaze followed the slender line of the Uchiha’s pale throat that had just moments ago- squeaking, he jumped out of the bed, as the sheet caught fire. “Madara”, he whined, however; the raven didn’t even bother turning around, as he left the room.

“Go fuck yourself, Hashirama.” Either metaphorically or physically… or both.

“Kumogakure is readying for battle.” Arms crossed in front of his chest, Kakuzu leaned back at one of their desks, frowning underneath his mask. At the second table, Tobirama set aside a handful of papers. “As long as they aren’t going against us, it’s none of our business”, he answered, tone unimpressed.

“That’s cold, Tobes”, Izuna answered mushily, shuffling fried rice into his mouth. He hadn’t had lunch yet, since he had left his home as soon as he’d entered it, upon feeling Hashirama’s rather unmistakable chakra flare uncontrolled, alongside with sounds he didn’t really wish to witness -well, at least not in relation to his brother. Instead, he had finished some leftover work at the Kage-Tower (alongside Tobirama, who had already been there, working on mission-timetables).

The Senju’s eyebrow twitched. “I already told you to stop calling me that”, he barked, before his voice calmed again. “We can’t solve every issue some village might or might not have”, he then continued. “We aren’t even able to solve all of ours, currently.”

“That is because your expectations are way too high”, Mito noted, flipping through a bunch of seal formula without looking up, while casually writing another one on the large mirror

with her red lipstick.

“I think we’re doing pretty well, considering we were rather devoted to gutting each other not even two years ago”, Izuna agreed, picking in his rice for another piece of fried pork. Change took time, after all, and every single one of them had experienced so much of it lately. Sometimes, it still made Izuna dizzy just thinking about *how much* had changed within so little time, after ages of war and death.

Kakuzu lifted one of his dark eyebrows. “We are shinobi”, he drawled. “We will always fight… if we stop doing so, we erase our own purpose. My sources don’t know whom against the leaders of Kumo are preparing to battle… but we can’t be ignorant and ignore the possibility of Konoha being targeted.”

Izuna made a face. “You know, it still bothers me how you know all of that and the rest of us are dumb as fuck”, he complained, making the assassin’s mask move in a manner that was obviously him smirking underneath. However; before he was able to answer, Mito’s frustrated voice cut in. “Why won’t it work”, complained, taking her -by now cold- cup of jasmine tea. “It just… we’re *so* close, I can taste it!”

Tobirama rose his head, stopping with his scribbling for a moment. “Maybe it’s because you smeared three layers of lipstick on the mirror already?”, he offered and dodged the lipstick cover she tossed at his head right after.

Pouting, since he didn’t find another piece of meat hidden within his fried rice, Izuna set the bowl aside (he needed to remember giving it back, otherwise he probably wouldn’t get another one “To Go”, as the vendor had called it) and grabbed a bunch of formula seals that had been left scattered on the table carelessly. By now, each of them was easily able to create the basic seals they used to work with -even Izuna himself, which was a little useless, considering he was the one to fill them in the first place. His Mangekyou Sharingan flickered to life and a few moments later, six seals were completed. As his eyes returned to their usual blackness, he handed two to each of them. “As long as we don’t know, being careful won’t hurt.”

“At least not us”, Kakuzu agreed and as Mito’s red lips widened in a grin bordering on the evil side of mean. Tobirama merely rolled his eyes, before carefully folding the papers and hiding them in his pockets. Hopefully, neither of them would need this… but a healthy amount of caution had yet to kill anyone.

Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Hashirama tries his best for peace. Madara doesn't, but what else is new

Chapter Notes

The biggest thanks to RegisteredFlexOffender, for leaving a comment to every chapter! And of course, to every single one of you, who comments. It means the world to me and really encourages me! Especially with chapters like these, since I really strugggled with it.

So... Stay healthy, stay safe!
(And btw... does anyone know how to add a link in here?)

“Admit it.”

“Fuck off.”

“Admit it!”

“Izuna, I swear to everything that’s holy-”

“Admit it ~ ”

Tobirama’s forehead started twitching violently.

“I won’t shut it ‘til you admit it and you know it!”

“Fine!” The Senju whirled around, his patience finally having run out. *“You. Were. Right!”*

Izuna grinned wildly, showing off a row of perfectly white teeth and Tobirama barely resisted the urge to punch a few of them loose.

“Are you really having this conversation?” The two of them turned around and Tobirama was the one to speak up. “No armour?”

Kakuzu huffed. “I never did well with those”, he drawled. “Too restricting.” From his shoulder, a mass of black, sweeping tendrils wove together, making the attached mask face them, to prove a point.

“Is it weird I find this strangely hot?”, Izuna asked sceptically, eyes lingering on the organic material. “*All* of you is weird”, Tobirama snapped back, the plates of his blue armour clacking, as he crossed his arms.

“Did anyone see Mito?”, Izuna changed the topic, stretching to his toes in an attempt to make her out somewhere in the mass of armoured shinobi.

“She’s with the Uzumaki”, Kakuzu answered and then lifted a dark brow. “You are rather calm about this”, he noted.

The Uchiha grinned with a rather unfamiliar kind of darkness, his eyes blooming red. “Of course, I am”, he then purred, as he flickered out of and into existence in front of them thrice, within just as many seconds. “This going to be so much fun.”

“This is no fun at all!”

“Shut up and get back to work, these missions needed to be calculated last week”, Madara ordered without even looking up from his own paperwork. They were behind schedule… which unfortunately was the case more often than not.

“I just had to do the same report thrice”, Hashirama whined, helplessly looking at the mess of clustered papers in his desk. Madara still didn’t raise his gaze from his own papers, which were just as many, but way more orderly stacked.

Next to them, Kakuzu was methodically working through a mountain of budget-reports and financial requests and didn’t even put down the “Declined”-stamp he had had demanded after his first day of taking over the money-department. Having been relieved of his most hated part of work, Hashirama had simply grown the assassin a seal out of Mokuton (and after that, a second one reading “Accepted” which was used far less often).

Madara got up, collecting some papers from Kakuzu’s table and quickly read through them. “Still no money for public toilets?”, he asked amused, not even making the masked assassin look up. “Hashirama can grow them, we need the budget to further develop the Academy’s teaching grounds”, he answered, once more bringing down the stamp, filing another paper away.

Madara made his way to Hashirama’s desk, ignoring the Senju’s sad pout and took a handful of papers, quickly shuffling through them. However, before he was able to get back to his own seat, the door swung open, revealing Shimura Furaku, one of their scouts on the far outlines of their borders.

“Hokage-sama!” At the urgent tone, all three of them looked up, as Kakuzu had merely continued working before. “Someone is approaching from North-East. They were too far away to be able to make out any clan emblems when I left to report, though.”

“It is more than one clan?”, Madara demanded clarification, making the scout nod. “Far more. From what we were able to make out… their number is larger than ours.”

Hashirama had gotten up from his seat, his work forgotten on the desk, pot of ink still opened. "Are you certain they are hostile?", he asked, but before Furaku was able to answer, Madara had already decided: "We can't wait until we are certain. We have to take action now."

"Madara-", the Hokage attempted to soothe his lover, however; Kakuzu interrupted him, arms crossed in front of his chest. "Kumogakure has been preparing for war for at least nine days. Approaching from North-East with that grand in number doesn't leave much space for coincidences. We need to get ready for battle."

"I already reported to Tobirama-sama and Izuna-sama; they currently are preparing the Uchiha and Senju", Furaku said. The two co-leaders had been sparring on the far-off grounds when he had returned to report and had demanded to be filled in as quickly as possible. Afterwards, they had told him to carry the message, filling in their brothers -and Kakuzu, who doubtlessly was going to connect the dots for Hashirama, since their peace-longing Kage would want to be absolutely certain before readying for a battle that might never happen.

However; now, the Hokage didn't waste a second. None of them could afford losing precious time, they had no more than a few minutes to get ready for battle. Within a second, six wooden clones formed from Hashirama's back, each of them jumping off at break-neck speed to inform their fellow clan-heads. Then, Hashirama turned to Furaku. "Take any preparations you need", he ordered. "We gather outside the main-gates as soon as possible."

Bowing once more, the Shimura rushed off, leaving the three of them behind. It would take mere minutes for everyone to be ready for battle. After all, everyone of them could easily remember the times they had been on their own, one clan versus the other, always prepared for fights, always prepared to die. Children too young to fight would stay with the Elders, at most with some disposable fighters. Neither of them had ever taken to planning a scenario such as this for Konoha, however; old habits die hard and even harder if your life depended on them, once.

"It would be helpful, if you'd take this seriously, Madara."

The Uchiha grinned. Way too widely, way too maniac. "Oh, I am, Hashirama. I am *deadly* serious."

Hashirama sighed. "Love, please."

Behind them, the clans had gathered. They had been able to move fast, arriving at their chosen battlefield before Kumogakure's forces -even though Hashirama still hoped for this to turn out as a misunderstanding. The field in front of them was large, not even a single tree daring to interrupt the area -and if so, Hashirama would have nudged it to retreat into its roots and re-grow its leaves once the battle was over. A breeze nuzzled their hair, having Madara's raven strands caress his armour and Hashirama realised this was the very first time they would be fighting alongside each other on the battlefield. Without thinking about it, he reached aside, brushing the stubborn strand of hair behind the raven's ear.

“If we wouldn’t need your lovey-dovey ass on the field, I’d slap the shit out of you.”

Hashirama sighed. “Romance is dead with you”, he muttered, making Madara cross his arms without even gifting his Kage a look. “If you really want to, you can suck my cock once this is dealt with. And now shut up; they’re coming and I assume you’ll try settling this non-violently, first.”

In the distance, a grand force of shinobi was swiftly cutting closer and Hashirama realised Furaku had been right: Their number was indeed bigger than that of Konoha’s people. However; once they had made it halfway across the field, Hashirama recognised a familiar face. “Kikoru-san?”, he asked, taken aback in surprise. The presence of Mito’s father suddenly made his hope for a simple misunderstanding way more reasonable. Now that he was at it, he recognised a couple of faces, even though most of them just vaguely, considering he hadn’t seen any of these Uzumaki more than once or twice at most. He took a step forth. “What a pleasant surprise! What leads you to Konohagakure?”

“Spare me the boredom, Senju.” The answer was cold, catching Hashirama by surprise -even more so, considering he had been the man’s future son-in-law not too long ago. Behind him, Hashirama was easily able to make out further Uzumaki -a large number; at least half of Uzushiogakure’s population. They hadn’t mingled with the rest of the gathered shinobi. Nearly all of them were wearing the symbol he by now knew referred to the Village hidden in the Clouds – he had seen it during the Kage Summit not too long ago, as it had been worn by… Hashirama frowned. “Where is the Raikage?”, he asked. He doubted A would have mingled with the masses, instead of leading them, like a true Kage should. During their meeting, Hashirama had experienced him to be harsh and rather unyielding but devoted to his village.

“That is none of your business”, another man answered. He was none of the Uzumaki and since Hashirama wasn’t familiar with the clans in the Land of Lightning, he was unable to place him. Additionally, most of Kumogakure’s people wore black-and-grey clothes, rather similar to some kind of uniform, making it even harder to identify them.

Hashirama frowned once more. “Considering you were heading straight through Fire-Country, I would say it is indeed our business”, he disagreed. “Tell me, then: What brings you here?”

“Don’t you dare playing stupid with us, Hokage”, the man bellowed and considering this probably was the one speaking for the Kumo-shinobi, Madara finally decided him important enough to note his mousy brown hair -not holding a candle against Hashirama’s beautiful deep umber shade-, his dull grey eyes and the overall absolutely ordinary… well, anything. “You have called in the Kage Summit, talked of peace, and yet at the same time collecting Tailed Beasts and binding them to your village, to wipe out the rest of us, as soon as possibility arises!”

Madara raised a single brow, not even trying to count all the ways this obviously was wrong. Hashirama planning to conquer *anything* was simply laughable. The man wouldn’t hurt a fly, if he wasn’t forced to. Just last week, Madara had seen him carrying a hornets’ nest that had fallen from a tree, fastening it on another one safer from the wind. His hands had been stung over and over but the Senju had laughed it off, even carefully removing one hornet’s stinger

from his skin, with the insect still on it, as to not have it hurt itself when attempting to fly away. (Madara had merely rolled bis eyes, before breathing out some smoke, effectively calming the hive, until the Hokage had fastened the nest.)

“The Kage Summit was held to form peace between the nations”, Hashirama answered. “To allow each of us to grow after an era of war and bloodshed. I assure you, Konohagakure has no interest in another war. Whatever lead you to believe such is misjudged!” So much for his hope to have all of this turn out as a misunderstanding… even though, apparently, it *was!* Just on a way larger scale than he had thought. At the Kage Summit, he hadn’t made a secret out of his wish to be at peace with the Bijuu. However; every other village could have attempted the same! “There is no need for this”, he continued. “You have my word; none of us has any interest whatsoever in ending the peace we worked far too hard to achieve.”

“Prove it!” The answer was immediate and Madara couldn’t help but be suspicious. This whole conversation felt strangely… rehearsed. Planned, even. As though every single of Hashirama’s answers had been carefully calculated beforehand.

“I will”, Hashirama meanwhile promised, over-eager as usual to find the peaceful solution to this drama. “Whatever has caused you to believe in our actions to be hostile-“

The other man -Madara still didn’t even know his name, not that he was interested in it- was once more far too eager with his reply, as he interrupted the Hokage. The raven narrowed his eyes. The whole conversation felt planned. Every single answer of Hashirama had been planned, leading him into this direction, this far too willingly given offer. “We want his eyes.” The Kumo-shinobi didn’t even point at Madara; after all, it was rather obvious whom he was referring to.

“Hand us the Uchiha’s eyes, Hokage. Then, we are willing to believe in your peaceful intentions.”

“No.” Hashirama’s answer was as immediate as it was finite and suddenly, the following silence felt far more heavy… and battle-pregnant.

“Then, peace means nothing to you.”

“Peace is everything”, Hashirama disagreed. “But I am a shinobi… and the Hokage. And as such, it is my very first duty to protect my people. And I will do so, until my dying breath.”

Finally, Madara had stepped forth, rotating the Gunbai in his right hand in both, showing off and battle-preparation. This whole conversation had been nothing but a façade. If it had been up to him, he would have already cut that Kumo-shinobi’s tongue… or rather his head, to be on the safe side. “We have created Konoha to put an ending to fruitless battle and death”, he declared. “And we *will* defend it.”

Before he was even able to finish his last words, the world rotated in focus, forcing the shadows to become darker, the sun brighter, the lines more crisp. He blinked, looking aside just in time to see nine perfectly round orbs form behind Hashirama’s back, locking into place in a perfect circle.

Seriously? Now of all times?! There was little worse on a battlefield than a power its wielder was unable to control.

“Avoid casualties on our side.” The Hokage’s voice was resigned, but calm. “And protect the village at all costs.”

And just like that… it was war all over again.

Madara catapulted himself forward, throwing eleven opposing shinobi off their feet with a single flick of his Gunbai, and making a face since he didn’t dare experimenting with these new eyes of his, in case it backfired on Konoha’s shinobi. He had absolutely no feeling for these new eyes of his and to top it off, he didn’t even know how to call his Sharingan to life! Last time, when he had used… whatever clones from Limbo the Rinnegan had materialised in his fury, it hadn’t even been him to deactivate it after. It had simply… switched off, like a light-bulb cut from electricity.

He gutted two Kumo-shinobi to let off at least some steam, carelessly ripping out a spleen and throing it into another opponent’s face. What even did the Uzumaki do in all of this? As much as he disliked Kikoru (and just for the records, Madara very proudly admitted he had a *lot* of dislike to spare), the Uzumaki clan-head was way too proud to let himself and his clan be used for this façade of a battle. This was just- *“Touka!”* The call was loud enough to pass across the sound of clashing swords and jutsu. *“Touka! I’m here!”*

Whoever it was, the voice emerged from somewhere behind Kumogakure’s frontline-fighters, either from right within or even all the way behind their forces.

“Who are you?”

Catching a kunai and flinging it onto another shinobi’s throat while evading some kind of metallic oversized senbon (cutting the user down quickly; too great risk for non-Sharingan wielders), Madara was easily able to make out Touka’s voice as she called back. Since Hashirama as their Kage lead the clan-heads and Tobirama was officially bound otherwise, Touka was the one to command the Senju-clan in battle. She was an outstanding kunoichi and without any doubt the most reasonable- “Touka-sama!”

He didn’t know who had yelled this time, however; it hadn’t been the unknown voice hailing from the Kumo-side of battle. If took him a moment to make his way to the voice’s source. A Senju, he didn’t remember his name, even though he was rather certain they had met before. The man -along a few others who looked just as spooked- still seemed shell-shocked, when Madara landed in front of them. “What happened?”, he demanded, ringed eyes searching for Touka, who had been around here somewhere.

“Touka-sama”, the man stammered, before collecting himself, attempting to answer. “Touka-sama just…”

“Madara!” The Uchiha looked up, nodding to the clone of Hashirama in greeting. This one was easily recognisable, even without wielding the Sharingan, due to the lack of orbs behind its back. He frowned. If Hashirama resorted to sending a clone this early it meant he both, had urgent news and was unable to deliver them in person. “I don’t know what happened, but

I heard someone call for Touka… and then she just disappeared. Not merely from the battlefield, but… all of her! I felt something lock up, hailing from the voice's estimated direction, but I have no idea what happened to her."

"Touka-sama just disappeared!" Finally, the Senju ceased being useless (for a change, the one being referred to wasn't Hashirama) and started to get a grip. "She called back to that voice and then she just… she was… she just disappeared!"

Within the moment, Madara cast out his senses, hyper-aware of every chakra-signature on the battle-field… and the absence of the very one he was searching for. "Shit", he spat. Touka's chakra was just… gone. Nowhere to be found in a radius easily covering two dozen miles. Whatever this was, his guts screamed it to be the very definition of bad.

It hadn't even been a full minute since Touka's disappearance. He didn't know whether this would work, hadn't tried it on anyone but himself, least of all on another living person. But time was running out and these eyes were currently useless! He needed his own, his Sharingan, his- He blinked, as his field of vision changed again, taken aback. Just like that? All he had to do was to *want* his own eyes back? He huffed quietly. Well, maybe he had just made things unnecessarily complicated. With a second flicker of red, his Mangekyou were called to life, rotating in their eternal pattern.

"Where did she disappear from?"

The Senju shinobi blinked at him. "Just… right off the spot and-" "Not that", Madara interrupted impatiently, supressing a growl in irritation. This guy was useless! "The exact spot she disappeared from! Where?" Nearly two minutes, now.

"Right there!" Thank Kami, another Senju had noticed the issue and taken pity. He stepped forth a few steps until standing rather close to Madara. "She stood exactly here and then just… vanished."

The Uchiha leader nodded. "Step away", he ordered, as his irises' pattern swirled. "Let's see if I can… *Reverse*… this."

The air seemed to stir and for a moment, nothing happened. And then, dust and rubble previously kicked aside in movement rippled upwards again instead of falling down. Two little stones rolled aside, even though none of them touched any. And with a rapid illusion of movement, Senju Touka appeared, her figure slightly… blurred, until finally, she was standing right in front of them again, taking a step back, even though her movement should have proved it to be one forwards. Her mouth opened and before she could say anything, Madara's palm had clasped above the lower half of her face.

"Let's not try out, whether this works twice", he advised.

Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

Such war, much wow

Chapter Notes

I struggled SO much with this chapter... Seriously, it took me three weeks to finish it and I really hope it turned out alright. But since this is probably one of the most complex chapters in this story, I'm sorry if I messed up.
When writing this chapter, I really hated Kichimoto for making those two THAT over-powered... and myself, for making it even worse. You have no idea how hard it was to make up an even halfway plausible excuse to nerf them, so the battle isn't over after two seconds and even now, I'm not certain it's reasonable.

Oh, and Fun fact: I came up with Madara's Mangekyou ability, BEFORE I read about him apparently being abe to twist time in the video game. I'm beyond canon with this :'D

“Next time, I’ll just go to war all by myself!” Once more, Madara dashed all the way across the battlefield, appearing next to two Shimura and a Yamanaka. His Mangekyou Sharingan rotated counter-clockwise and already were slightly aching from strain, as he forced time to flow backwards yet again. When he had first noticed this particular ability sleeping within his eyes, he had barely even trained it, due to the degenerating effect it had on his already withering eyesight. And aside from his many battles with Hashirama… well, there simply never had been any need. How utterly perfect, having his own battle-prowess backfire in the worst possible moment.

A Senju kunoichi re-appeared in front of him, as her capture into whatever jutsu those Kumo-shinobi used became undone in the most literal meaning. His senses were working near overdrive, constantly kneading chakra, searching for one single source disappear yet again amongst all of their gathered people.

It made him wonder -not for the first time- why none of the Kumo-nin had attempted calling his name by now since he, at least for now, was the only one able to free the caught Konoha-shinobi.

For once, he didn’t find a fading chakra signature, and quickly cut across the battlefield once more, decapitating two Kumo-shinobi conveniently battling an Akamichi in his way.

“Ichigo-san.”

The Yamanaka clanhead turned his head to nod towards him, without loosening the sheep-seal his fingers were forming. “We are getting better”, the blond man cut straight to the core, not bothering with useless formalities. As soon as Senju Touka had returned to -or rather, had never left- the battlefield, Madara had immediately sent word to Ichigo, as to have him inform all of their shinobi to not reply to any kind of voice calling out for them. The Yamanaka’s mind-manipulation had allowed them to spread the order all across their forces in a matter of minutes, waring each and every one of them from answering the call. However…

“Whatever jutsu they are using, it also awakens the victim’s urgent need to respond”, Nara Nitatsumi reported, making Madara nod. This much, they had discovered early on. Even though everyone had been warned, only a few of them *hadn’t* responded after their name had been called. The urge was just too great to withstand, for most of them. “Currently, we are attempting combining Shadow-manipulation alongside the Yamanaka’s mind-work, as to forcefully preserve our people refrain from answering.”

It was impressive, Madara couldn’t help but notice. Even though both, Nara and Yamanaka weren’t known to bring forth great battle-force, their brilliant minds were just as valuable - joined even more so. If they worked out a possibility to locate the call’s victims and have them refrain from answering, Madara finally would be able to participate in battle, after all this was just – he grit his teeth as once again, a chakra-signature vanished from the battlefield and bolted off as quickly, as he had arrived, not bothering to answer.

Right after Touka, Hashirama had been the second one to be called… and he had been the first to refrain from answering. The voice had been persistent, calling out again and again but fortunately, hadn’t been able to draw in their Kage.

Madara would have kicked Hashirama’s ass right into next week, if it had.

Izuna grit his teeth. “I can’t.”

Frowning, Tobirama quickly got rid of two Kumo-nin; slitting one’s aorta, while perfectly flinging a poisoned senbon into the second’s. The plan had been simple. Forty-seven seconds of a time-skip should have been more than enough time to make it across the battle-field and into Kumo’s forces, detect whatever jutsu or tool they used to snatch their people after they answered what Izuna had titled The Voice of Doom, and in the best case, destroy it. Afterwards, he had been supposed to use a second Skip to make it back to their side of the battle-field.

However; long story short: It didn’t work out.

“I was able to make it behind their last line of battle”, the Uchiha explained. “But I couldn’t get farther; something kept me off. And I couldn’t see anything either; they just sealed everything off.” It had been as though giant mirrors had been set up, reflecting the outside and not allowing anything inside to be seen. And no matter what, his time limit was way too

short to make it past that. He hadn't even been able to kill a bunch of Kumo-shinobi, since his biggest goal had been not drawing any attention. Seriously, this whole battle just sucked ass.

"You're a genius, Izuna."

He looked up, meeting Mito's gaze and grinned. "Tell that to the white-haired bastard", he demanded, making Tobirama growl at him. "Every dog has its day once in a while", the albino commented, and Mito whacked both of their heads from behind, resulting in two rather satisfying flinches.

"It's seals", she then explained. "I can't believe I've been too blind to notice, especially considering so many Uzumaki are present… They probably sealed a specific area right behind the battle-field, as to not have anyone either notice or interrupt whatever they're doing. We need to release them, to be able to get access to the inside."

"I can get you to the border, but I can't release the seals", Izuna cautioned. "We all know; I'm the one most unfitted of us for fūinjutsu." Even Kakuzu was better at it… but well, if he managed to seal five hearts at once into his chest, he couldn't be a beginner, Izuna deemed. However; he had absolutely no talent in that field and well… up to not, it had never been necessary.

"You know, the world was so much more simple when this was just between you and me", he complained to Tobirama. "You know… you trying to gut me, me trying to gut you… good old times."

"I can still gut you, when all of this is over", the Senju warned. "Now, get going. And where the hell is Kakuzu?!"

For a thing this tiny, the fan was able to cast some impressive jutsu, Hashirama deemed. Its range was at least half of Madara's and what was even more formidable was how it was able to unleash all five elements. It had taken him a while, to pry the Kumo-shinobi wielding the weapon far enough off the battle-field, to not have any of his own people caught in the crossfire.

"This is pointless", he attempted to reason for the fourth time by now. "Retreat and we won't attempt to take revenge. You have my word!"

Not Madara's, though, but he would at least *try* to hold his lover back. Admittedly, his chances were rather slim to begin with, but he had always been known to defeat the odds.

An enormous Raiton-jutsu was unleashed as his opponent swung the fan once more and Hashirama couldn't help but wonder where he took the chakra-resources needed to cast jutsu this destructive from. Whatever this battle-fan was, it was requiring enormous masses of chakra to work and even though Hashirama didn't know *how*, he knew they had to hail from some outer source.

For the moment, though, it hardly mattered, as the jutsu crashed into the wooden barrier Hashirama raised behind himself to cut off any possible damage to his shinobi. The electricity set fire to the large branches he had summoned, many of them having been destroyed by the impact. “I take that as a No”, Hashirama muttered, clearly unhappy. Very well, then. This fight wouldn’t take any longer; Madara needed him on the battle-field and thus, a quick nick to his thumb was enough to draw a few droplets of blood, the small wound closing during the process already.

However; before he was able to cast his Summon, three Kumo-shinobi joined the fight.

“You were supposed to hold back”, the man wielding the fan said, gritting his teeth as one of the new participants simply answered: “You were losing.”

The three of them were armoured rather sparely, but if this whole set-up didn’t scream suspicious, Hashirama didn’t know what did. The one standing to the left carried a broad-sword, nearly as huge as the ones he himself used on occasion. The right one had some kind of… rope wrapped around his arms and the middle one merely caried a huge pot of… something on his back.

A drop of blood dripped from his finger, the moment to cast his summoning jutsu forgone.

And then, the Kumo-nin to the right lifted his arm and without any verbal command, the glowing rope leaped forward, straight at Hashirama. With a flicker of his fingers, a pair of roots shot forward, catching off the strange weapon, however; it passed straight through them without even slowing down. This was bad, Nin-Jutsu apparently was useless and since a nagging waring in the back of his mind urged him not to let that weapon *touch* him, so was Tai-Justu.

He had to stop that rope and he had to do so *right now!*

That was the moment the black orb collided with the rope’s path, knocking it aside with enough force to have its wielder get thrown aside and nearly crash into one of his many wooden walls.

With a Thud, the orb re-took its place back in the circle above Hashirama’s back, making the Hokage blink. So *that* was how those things worked!

However; before he had time to consider these orbs apparently worked as soon as he merely wanted them to, the fan was swung once more but this time away from him, sending a giant cyclone into the main battlefield’s direction. Quickly, he erected another wooden wall, having roots and branches splinting as the jutsu was stopped in his path. Immediately, the rope once more shot straight onto him, making another orb force it aside. This time, he allowed it to soak some more chakra, attempting to either tear the weapon it half or force its wielder to let go.

Instead, the orb crashed into his own Mokuton, erected to protect the main-battlefield, completely splintering it with its force and grinding to the ground. Hashirama blinked.

That hadn’t been supposed to happen.

“Hashirama!” Oh, for the love of- *“Hashirama! Please, I need you!”* He clamped his mouth shut, forcefully pressing his lips together to supress the urge to answer. To him, the Voice nearly sounded like Madara, calling out to him on the thralls of pleasure -or the deepest desperation. The fact that Madara was more than capable of caring for himself (at least mostly) didn’t help overly much in repressing the need to answer. Ever so carefully, he let the orbs hovering above his back rotate. He didn’t know -and even more so, didn’t want to find out- whether he actually had to answer the Voice to get sucked into… whatever it was… or if merely saying *anything* would trigger the jutsu as soon as his name had been called. Due to that, he decided to stick to Jutsu he was able to summon without articulating, which limited him rather efficiently, considering that blasted rope still limited his movements.

For a moment, the urge to curse even outweighed the one to call back.

“Katon: Gōka Mekkyaku!”

Finally.

Fucking *finally!*

A wall of blazing fire erupted in front of him, waltzing everything in its path to ashes until merely barren, coaled earth remained, annihilating every shinobi in its path.

With a burst of dust, he sprung backwards, turning left and unsheathing his katana. The Voice apparently had decided to focus on attempting to get to Hashirama, leaving the rest of their force alone for the time being and Madara couldn’t help but snort at that stupid-ass decision. Hashirama wasn’t just pig-headed, he was *wooden-headed* and trying to force his Kage into giving in was an arrogant attempt at best (fucking stupid, that’s what it was).

Blood coated his blade and as his face got sprinkled in red, he threw back his head and laughed. “Don’t you dare getting caught, Hashirama”, he cackled. “I’m *finally* having some fun!”

“Monster!”

The voice hailed from somewhere to his right; a Kumo-kunoichi whose armour was drenched in blood -probably her own- but apparently had survived his blade. He stopped, turning around to face her, and felt a grin splitting his face. This was battle, this was war and he could feel his own blood pumping in his veins, could feel the enemies’ blood cooling on his skin and the only moments he felt more alive were invariably linked to a certain Senju’s cock within him, his hand buried in Madara’s hair at the thralls of pleasure.

His lips spread even wider, white teeth glowing far too brightly in his blood-sprinkled face. “What are you going to do about it?”

He had to hold it to her; she actually tried flicking a poisoned senbon at him. He caught he weapon inches away from his face, noticing the clear liquid dripping off its tip. He twirled the small weapon for a moment, before taking a step closer to her.

“Your effort is appreciated”, he noted. With a flick of his fingers, the senbon’s tip buried into the woman’s throat.

Out of his eye’s corner, ne noticed movement and flipped back, easily avoiding the weapon aimed at him, which turned out to be a… rope? He landed on his feet, whirling around and facing three shinobi, the left of them the one who apparently had thrown the rope at him. Another one carried a sword that looked absolutely ridiculous on him and the third had a fucking pot tied to him. He lifted one of his slender eyebrows, obviously unimpressed by the display.

Once more, the rope bolted onto him and he let it wrap around his forearm, before using the connection to easily jerk its wielder off his feet.

“And what do *you* want from me?”, Madara asked, more annoyed than anything else. He had had *fun*! As long as Hashirama didn’t screw up and answer the Voice that for some reason still hadn’t given up on attempting to lure him in for the longest it had ever bothered calling someone, he was free to- he staggered, as the rope started to glow even further and the second shinobi aimed his blade at the glowing surface, cutting it and separating-

The world turned upside down and seemed to shift and then colours blurred backwards as gravity pulled him into another direction and the world turned the wrong way around him.

When the rope cut close to him this time, he flipped back and avoided getting caught by whatever weapon this thing was. His Mangekyou Sharingan rotated as the world manifested once more around him. Forcing himself to recoil in time wasn’t the most pleasurable experience but whatever this rope was, having allowed it to touch him had been an unwise idea and he certainly wouldn’t repeat that mistake -or rather, prevent it from happening in the first place, since that probably was the correct term.

Unfazed by backflip, the rope pursued him further and he flipped and twisted to avoid getting caught. This wouldn’t be good enough, he was in the middle of the battle-field, friend and foe alike surrounding him. It would merely be a matter of time until they would begin to persuade other Konoha-shinobi, forcing him into defensive once again, since protecting his - their; Hashirama’s and his- people would always be the ultimate goal.

The broad sword got swung at his upper body, making him rise his Gunbai to block the blow, sending the opponent who wielded it staggering back while twisting sideways to evade the rope he had really come to despise by now.

Being in the defence fucking sucked.

Once more, the rope cut close. He needed to find a way force it off. He blinked. He needed to find a way to force it off… to push it off. Push… *“Push.”*

As his vision changed, he felt gravity twisting around him, forcing the rope that had been inches away from him into the opposite direction, flinging it back to its user.

When the dust settled, Madara blinked. These eyes were still foreign to him, like a part of him that had changed without him realising, making it hard to control and overall, he still

didn't even know how they were activated in the first place. The Sage of Six Paths could have at least considered explaining *something* about the Rinnegan to him, before returning to his grave.

The rope went at him again and this time, shifting gravity to keep it off was hardly any effort at all.

His katana stayed sheathed and instead, he rotated his Gunai and twirled the sickle he had come to appreciate more and more over the last years, allowing a grin to split his face once again

Dead people couldn't throw stupid ropes, could they?

"This fucking bites!"

"Don't be a drama queen."

Izuna huffed, crossing his arms. Mito and Tobirama were absolutely engrossed into a bunch of seal-sheets, attempting to figure out a way to get rid of whatever the Uzumaki had set up behind the Kumo-shinobi's last line of defence. Unfortunately, Izuna was absolutely useless in that regard but since his visual powers would inevitably be needed to accomplish… whatever those two were plotting, he was bound to stay close.

"If we kill off all of Kumo, there won't be any defence we'd need to get around", he complained. Why didn't anyone even consider just dealing with the masses before getting to the complicated parts? But no, apparently, he was part of a group now and as such, had to stick to them.

Which would be a way bigger argument, if Kakuzu hadn't just fucked off to *somewhere* and left the rest of them alone. Seriously, being part of the Brains-Team was way less fun when they weren't just messing around with the fabric of time in their lab.

Next to them, a shinobi cut close at rapid speed and Izuna turned around. "What the fuck have you been up to?!"

"Being useful, unlike you", came the rather brutal answer and the Uchiha huffed again. On the list of all battles he had participated in, this one really sucked the most. Kakuzu shot a short glare at Mito and Tobirama, who hadn't even acknowledged his arrival, before looking back at Izuna.

"The masses of chakra being consumed by some of those shinobi are far above average chakra-resources", the assassin said, making Izuna nod. He had noticed the same, but without being able to get close, he couldn't make out specifics. "I never saw anyone except Aniki and Hashirama use that excessive amounts", the Uchiha noted. "There's no way normal shinobi would be able to bring forth so much without dropping dead right after."

Kakuzu nodded. “Whatever chakra-source they’re using, it’s extern but I haven’t been able to track it.”

Izuna grinned widely. “Are you implying what I think you’re implying?”

“If we can find their chakra-source and cut it off, the rest will be easy game. Let’s go; you’re useless over here, anyway.”

“Fucking finally!”

Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

In which Zetsu was supposed to SHORTLY explain his super-evil plans but somehow they got ridiculously complicated and now it's half the chapter.
Also, Izuna's the smart one.

Chapter Notes

Well… I must admit, I fucked up a bit.
When I planned all of this, I had in mind the Crimson Gourd being able to seal a person's soul word -and thus, their soul- but leaving the body behind. So yeah... I realised too late that Nope, the victim's body gets sealed, too, if the Gourd is used successfully. But if the body gets sealed, my plot won't work out -which was hard enough to come up with, as it is.
Therefore, I had to twist canon a little and now, it's up to the Gourd's wielder whether the victim gets fully sealed, or if merely their soul gets taken and the lifeless body is left behind.
(Bruh, it feels like this is a bigger change of canon than Hashirama and Madara being gay for each other.)

"I will have to enter the battlefield myself."

"Are you certain? I cannot afford to lose you."

Offering a deep bow, he answered: "I assure you, you will not. But I am afraid, no one but me will be able to take the necessary steps to ensure your victory."

"Go, then", came the order. "I trust you not to disappoint me."

No, he would not, Zetsu thought, as he slithered into the ground. After all, this battle was the core of his carefully crafted plan. After feeling the Rinnegan awaking, preparing all of this had taken months; months of careful planning and even more careful executing. Pressuring the Daimyo into supporting this battle had been easier than calculated, once he had planted the believes about Konohagakure scheming insurrection. Acquiring power -and more so, keeping it once obtained- tended to make people remarkably concessive.

Having Kumogakure participating in his plans had been more difficult.

His speeches of the Uchiha and Senju striding for power by uniting had fallen on deaf ears. “Of course, they do”, the Raikage had merely answered, once Zetsu had finally managed to speak to the man personally. “As did we, when we united the clans of the Land of Lightening.” And even worse, when he had implied of Konohagakure attempting to overthrow the Land of Fire in order to gain enough power to dominate Cloud-Village, he had been answered with: “There is not one of us, who seeks peace more than Senju Hashirama. But even if he truly wished to conquer the Land of Lightning, there is little we could do to stop him and that Uchiha. I have seen the Hokage’s power and it is greater than mine.”

With that, he had been ordered to leave, seething with anger. How *dare* he? How dare the Raikage get in his way when after all these years, all these eons, he *finally* would be able to free Mother?!

Things had taken a turn for the better, when he had taken to linger in the local pubs -which was a rather easy feat, considering only two of them existed, currently. Once the village grew further, their number would without a doubt increase.

Konohagakure wants to take over Fire Country and Lightning will be next.

They aren’t quite ready for war, yet.

A-sama refuses to take action.

The Daimyo of Fire Country wants to stop them.

I heard he asked for help, he is even willing to pay greatly...

Of course, it had taken time, until people started to believe. More than a month, before the first ones had started muttering to each other at street corners. And after that even longer, until more of them had openly shown displeasure about the Raikage’s decision of ignorance.

Zetsu didn’t know what the shinobi of Kumogakure had done with their Kage, but he frankly spoken didn’t care. When the Daimyo had sent message to Kumo, to ask them to assist him in ending Konohagakure’s stride for power, it hadn’t been A who had responded. Instead, it had been a group of three shinobi who had written back, claiming they would stop Konoha before their influence would grow even further.

Zetsu had returned to Kumogakure a few days later, bearing message from the Daimyo, who would of course pay them greatly for their help… and who had heard of ancient artifacts that had been passed on for generations amongst the clans of Lightning-Country.

It was a wonder they still existed after all this time, Zetsu mused. If he wanted to be able to win a battle against a Rinnegan-user -no matter how unexperienced- these weapons were indispensable. Every single one needed extreme amounts of chakra to function, therefore limited their usage, especially considering three of them needed to be wielded together to perform successfully. But that was one of the easier problems to solve, especially once he had gotten word of a particular dispute between the Senju and their cousin-clan, the Uzumaki. Their clanhead had been furious the Hokage spurning his daughter in order to continue this

wrenched, disgusting affair with Uchiha Madara… and revenge was as good of a reason as any other, to go to war.

Unfortunately, a few Uzumaki had already decided to leave the village, and some more not to participate in a war against the Senju, but that didn't truly matter. A few of them gifted in the arts of fūinjutsu were enough, to help him carry out his plans. Everyone else was merely a bonus, if a welcome one.

An unwelcome surprise, however, had been the Hokage's Six Paths. Battling a Rinnegan user was a hard enough feat on its own. Paired with the Power of Six Paths however, had made Zetsu's sole advantage their inexperience with these powers.

For a while, everything had gone according to plan, even though with some additional difficulties. He had taken great care in scheming the usage of the Sage's tools, but this new turn of events had forced him to have them used far more often than calculated.

The Kohaku no Jōhei had been working perfectly, recording Senju Touka's voice and sealing her within itself, as soon as she had answered its Call.

Immediately after that first experiment, he had ordered Senju Hashirama's name to be Called. Once the Hokage got sealed, a big player on the enemy's battle-lines would be erased.

However; his calculation had turned out be wrong, merely due to the fact that Senju Hashirama simply refused to answer; biting his lips to refrain from giving away himself.

It doesn't matter, he had ordered. They couldn't wait for too long; each Call made had to be fed with enormous masses of chakra -and at that time, Zetsu had already realised he'd needed to be careful with his resources. *Target the others; we need their leaders to answer. But do* not *aim for Uchiha Madara!* If the Uchiha leader got sealed away into the Kohaku no Jōhei, every single glimpse of hope was lost; the Rinnegan would be destroyed. He needed Uchiha Madara alive -or rather: those eyes of his, that were his single hope to finally free Mother.

And then, the unthinkable had happened.

The Uchiha had found a way to un-do the seals, found a way to get back the shinobi already sealed within the Purification Jar. Had *dared* using these eyes against him, against his need to free Mother!

But fortunately, he had proven to be the only one able to do so… and determined to not let a single useless shinobi of Konohagakure's force meet their inevitable fate. *Do not stop Calling! No matter whom; take out as many as you can!* He needed to keep the Uchiha busy enough as for him not to be able to meddle with his plans even further. *Do not use the Call on Uchiha Madara; he might destroy the jar from the inside!* Do not let them seal the eyes, protect the eyes!

At that time, he had been glad to have been prescient enough to have already ordered the Bashōsen onto the battlefield. The Banana-Fan was a tool of destruction, merely meant to be used to split up Konohagakure's forces. However; his plans had worked out even better than intended, as no other than Senju Hashirama went head to head with the Fan's user.

Just like the Purification Jar, the Fan required extreme amounts of chakra to be wielded successfully and the more chakra its user charged, the more destructive its attacks turned out. *Do not hold back*, he had ordered. *Senju Hashirama mustn't enter the battlefield again.* The Hokage was too powerful, unfortunately even more so than calculated. If he was left to roam on his own, he would surely beat down Kumogakure's forces in no time.

And while the Banana-Fan had indeed proven to be able to keep the Hokage busy enough to not have him wrack havoc amongst Kumogakure's shinobi, the Senju had soon enough been able to draw the Fan's wielder off the battlefield and without a doubt defeat him and claim the Sage's weapon within a far too short time-span. Thus, Zetsu had been forced to send the last of his arsenal, forcing his hand far too early.

The Kōkinjō, Shichiseiken and Benihisago were only able to unleash their full potential if they were wielded together. Only if the Golden Rope was used to capture the victim's word soul, the Seven Star's Blade would be able to cut it, finally allowing the Crimson Gourd to seal the severed word soul and allowing it to seal the victim's mind and soul alike within itself. However; these three weapons needed to be chakra-fed, as well, and even though their reserve had seemed nearly endless, Zetsu was very aware it was not. He needed to get rid of the Hokage! Once Senju Hashirama was done for, the biggest obstacle between himself and the Rinnegan would be nullified.

Seal Senju Hashirama, he had ordered. *By any means necessary!* God of Shinobi or not, not even the Hokage could win against all five Treasures at once. With the Kohaku no Jōhei calling out for him, the Banana Fan unleashing its most destructive jutsu and the Crimson Gourd ready to seal him alongside the Golden Rope and the Seven Star's Blade, even the mighty Hokage would fall.

Except he didn't.

Minutes and minutes passed with the Hokage stoically refusing to return the Purification Jar's Call, while continuing to push back the wielder of both, the Bashōsen and the Kōkinjō. Every minute they failed was one of great masses of chakra lost and Zetsu had nearly howled in anger as the *cursed* Senju dared to refuse him time and time again.

Until, simple as it was, there wasn't enough chakra left to be going on like that.

No matter what, Zetsu was very aware his chances of success were dropping to basically zero, the moment his forces were unable to use the Sage's Treasures any longer.

Leave the Hokage be, he had ordered the wielders of the Golden Rope, Sword and Gourd. *Your true opponent is Uchiha Madara. Seal him, whatever it takes! But do not dare to seal his body! It will be needed to achieve victory over Konoha later on!* Curse that stubborn Uchiha! Having the Gourd aimed at him was a risk Zetsu had been keen to avoid, but the current events hadn't left him with another option.

If he still wanted to achieve victory, he had to make sure that this time that the sealings would be successful on both, the Senju and the Uchiha -and for that, he needed to greatly increase the masses of chakra consumed by the Sage's Treasures, in order to have them unleash their powers at their greatest level.

Which brought him back to the present, emerging from the ground within the Uzumaki's seal-barrier.

Pouring all the chakra left into the Treasures at once was his last stand but it would be successful. If he failed, Mother would stay sealed away for however long it took until another Rinnegan would wake… and that simply wasn't an option.

On the far-off side of the battlefield, Tobirama crossed his arms. "Are you certain?"

Izuna rolled his eyes. "No, we just sneaked all over the place so we didn't have to see your ugly face any longer."

"Fuck off", Tobirama answered dryly, however; before the useless debate could continue any further, Kakuzu stepped in. "We checked every single one of these strange weapons -at least the four of them currently on the battlefield. Considering that cursed Voice, we have to assume there's at least one more. But every single one of them relies on the exact same chakra."

Finally growing serious again, Izuna gave a curd nod. "I didn't notice, at first, because compared to Aniki and Hashirama's reserves, it doesn't seem that much… but all of them are getting charged by the same chakra signature."

"That means whatever feeds these weapons with chakra, it can't be their wielders", Mito noted, crossing her arms as well and mirroring Tobirama's gesture all the way down to the unhappy frown.

"I can't think of anyone except Madara and Hashirama, who might possess enough amounts of chakra to spare the resources needed to even cover the usage of a single weapon", Kakuzu added. Whatever source they were using to feed those… things, it had to be enormous.

"Still no luck with breaking the seal-barrier?", Tobirama asked, making Mito shake her head. "We're on it", she reported, "But even for Uzumaki, un-doing our own fūinjutsu is a challenge."

"Whatever is behind that barrier is either the chakra-source or is used to transfer it into these weapons. We need to tear down these seals and put an end to it", Tobirama noted grimly. Everything was up to Konohagakure's Uzumaki, now. Once fully working, even he struggled when it came to un-do Uzumaki fūinjutsu. The Whirlpool's seals were infamous for a reason, after all.

"Too bad the ground is sealed, as well", Izuna muttered. It would've made things so much easier if- "It isn't."

The Uchiha looked up at Mito. "Pardon me?"

"The ground isn't sealed", Mito repeated. Why would it? The seal-barrier prevented anything from entering, there was simply no reason to seal the grounds, too. They had even checked

such while trying to find a way to un-do the fūinjutsu.

“And why”, Izuna started, looking incredulous, “Are we still standing here, then?”

“Because we need to break that barrier, in case you have forgotten”, Tobirama barked, his patience running thin. That was what they had been trying for the past He didn’t know how long!

“And why the fuck don’t we just enter the fucking barrier from underground, if that isn’t sealed off?!”, Izuna shot back, sounding just as irritated.

Silence. Tobirama blinked. Mito didn’t even do that.

Then: “… You have been trying to figure out a way to break that barrier but you didn’t just think about *digging a fucking tunnel?!*” They had to be shitting him. They had to, there was no way *anyone* -not even Hashirama- could be that fucking stupid.

“And there I thought the sole reason was the grounds being secured, as well, and we therefore didn’t even talk about it”, Kakuzu drawled. “If we ever go to war again, Izuna’s in charge.”

“Why, thank you”, the Uchiha answered wryly. “In that case, can we end this one, first? I’m dying for a shower.”

“At least not from embarrassment”, Kakuzu cackled loudly, apparently finding the whole situation hilarious.

“I suck at Doton. I won’t be able to create a tunnel and get all of us through it from over here, before my time’s up”, Izuna warned and Kakuzu, having calmed at least a little, nodded. “Let’s get to the spot to the west; when we followed the chakra signatures, it was unsecured and far closer to the barrier.”

It didn’t take long, arriving at the place, but Tobirama’s constant muttering about how he couldn’t believe any of this made it seem much longer. Mito just didn’t say anything, her face even paler than normal.

Kakuzu quickly ran a demonstration of hand-seals required to set up an underground tunnel, having Izuna repeat them once without infusing chakra, to make sure he wouldn’t fuck up and ruin this absolutely not geniusly crafted plan.

“I’ll start the jump, if you’re ready”, Izuna warned. “Prepare yourselves, we won’t get another chance.”

The three of them nodded and with a whirl of blood-red eyes, the Uchiha disappeared.

“I still can’t believe it”, Tobirama muttered. “It was just… why…” They had been wrecking their brains in an attempt to break the barrier-seals when all along the answer had been to just *ignore* them and go around?

“Get a grip, Senju”, Kakuzu grinned, the notion obvious underneath his mask. “Just consider it a lesson in working smarter, not harder.” After all, his Mangekyou wasn’t the only reason

Izuna was part of their not-so-secret group. With Mito and Tobirama around, it just tended to be forgotten that underneath all that attitude, Izuna indeed had a working brain.

Instead of answering, Tobirama drew his katana. Due to the task of having to bring the tree of them into the barrier after opening the tunnel, Izuna had quite certainly gone close to his limit of forty-seven seconds -probably aiming for forty-five, as to not strain his eyes to their absolute limit. But even those were almost up and-

Without even blinking, he found himself within an unfamiliar place, surrounded by around a dozen Uzumaki and a few Kumo-shinobi. Without pausing to take in his surroundings more closely, he flashed forward, slitting a Kumo-nin's throat and stabbing an Uzumaki through her chest. Next to him, Izuna disappeared once more and when he re-emerged a few seconds later, three Uzumaki collapsed, their throats cuts as well. He heard a neck breaking underneath Kakuzu's hands and Mito was the only one keeping her clan-mates alive by sealing two of them into place.

More than half of the small group within the barrier was done for, before any of them even had a chance to react to their arrival.

Merely four shinobi and two kunoichi remained, however; after yet another dis- and reappearance of Izuna, those dropped dead, as well, before they could reform.

Mito went to work immediately, starting to un-do the barrier-seals shutting the place off (or rather, failed to so due to considerable design-flaws, Izuna decided), having the rest of them gather around some kind of… distributor. Masses of chakra got infused from… somewhere…, before being split up and without a doubt channelled to the creepy weapons of doom. Half a dozen of seals contained the incoming chakra, and one more was used for each divided streak. Izuna didn't even try to understand the fūinjutsu behind something that ridiculously complicated.

"The seals and interfering with the chakra-signature", Tobirama noted. "I can't identify its origin."

Well, at least someone was up to speed.

"The barrier and the distribution-seals are connected", Mito reported. "I need to separate them, before I can un-do anything, or I can't rule out the possibility of our chakra being fed into those seals, as well."

Izuna shuddered. "Please, do. I like my chakra where it is."

A few moments later, Mito frowned. "There's another barrier-seal", she reported. "North-east, not too far. The chakra divided here hails from inside it; whatever it is they're using."

"If we break the barriers, we'll be able to identify their chakra-source", Tobirama noted, finally being back from the valley of depression. "How much longer?"

"How about now?" Mito's hands flew through a bunch of signs, before finally connecting with the barrier itself.

“Release!”

On the opposite side of the battlefield, Hashirama took a step back. A tendril of his Mokuton had pierced his lips, sewing them together in the most efficient way to have him refrain from answering the Call, which had been getting so much more difficult over the last minutes.

The Fan’s last attacks had been far more fierce than those before; one had even managed to crush the shield he had created to protect his people on the battlefield, before finally being stopped by one of his spheres getting into the caster’s way.

However; this was the climax, of that he was certain. The last effort to win against him and get… whatever it was, Kumogakure wanted to achieve.

Once more, the Fan started gathering chakra and- somewhere far off, something exploded (or imploded? He wasn’t certain) and he frowned, when finally, he as able to detect the stream of chakra being led into the Battle-Fan in front of him -and probably into the other artefacts used to fight him and Madara. It was strangely compressed, but he couldn’t help but get over the feeling of familiarity.

Something else was broken -another seal? More than one, probably- and the moment Hashirama finally was able to recognize the chakra used against them, he blanched. *No*...

He had to end this quickly, he had to- even more chakra got forcefully charged into the Battle-Fan, clearly in preparation of a final attack supposed to end this fight, far more than at any point before during the battle.

He could feel what was probably the other weapons they had been fighting feeding off the chakra-source as well, and forcefully gripped his katana. He had been considerate so far, putting his peoples’ life above all else, but he wouldn’t let-

From somewhere far, far off a bone-rattling scream born out of pure agony hailed across the battlefield, leaving no doubt about its owner’s suffering.

No!

And then, without any further warning, the chakra-source collapsed, leaving behind nothing but emptiness, after having been fully consumed by whatever was used to drain her chakra. The tendril tore his lips apart and blood dropped drown his chin, as Hashirama’s own, agony-filled scream tore across the battlefield.

“Matatabi!”

Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

In which no one knows what's going on, except me cuz I got the over 9000 plot-plan.
At least, that's what I like to tell myself.

Chapter Notes

I am SO sorry.
Real Life hads been a bitch and Corona certainly isn't helping. And whatever free time I had went straight to Shadowlands for the last two months.
I really hope you haven't forsaken me yet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"-ara!"

He twitched.

"Madara!"

He coughed; the sound far too wet for even his own liking.

Groaning, he forced one eye open. His sight was blurred, nearly as bad as it had been before Izuna forced him to take his eyes. And they were *hurting*… or rather, the major headache he had, did. His lungs hadn't been this bad in what felt like ages.

Hashirama's warm palm was already on his forehead, gently infusing soothing chakra, but apparently, it only accomplished so much. Struggling to order his thoughts, he attempted to concentrate. "What happened?"

The blur that was Hashirama shook his head. "I don't have the slightest idea."

Truth to be told, neither had Madara, as he struggled to regain his wits. His head rested in Hashirama's lap and he allowed his eye to slip shut again. It made concentrating easier. "Your chakra disappeared", he finally realised. "From the battlefield. Whatever they used to capture our shinobi got to you, too. I reversed it, but… I can't remember anything else." His brain felt like wet cotton and just as useful.

Hashirama carded through his tangled strands of hair, gently infusing chakra to his sore throat. "Is it possible… we're both trapped into whatever they used to lure us?", he asked

carefully.

Still not opening his aching eyes, Madara frowned and shook his head -not his best idea; the motion left him far too nauseous. “I succeeded”, he disagreed, coughing and swallowing half a mouthful of blood. “But I can’t remember anything after.” He bit back the urge to throw up; *everything* was hurting and even concentrating on as much as Hashirama’s voice proved to be nearly impossible.

Frowning, Hashirama gently intensified the rate of medical chakra infusion even further. If Madara hadn’t even realised their current situation, the Uchiha’s state was even worse than his first check-up had indicated.

The last he remembered was the raging battle with Kumogakure’s forces, and that strange voice that had called out to him relentlessly. He hadn’t answered, very aware of the potentially disastrous result, but then -he tensed and for a moment, the fingers carding through Madara’s raven hair stopped before he forced himself to continue as to not disturb the Uchiha’s rest.

Matatabi.

The last flickering reserves of Matatabi’s chakra that had been used to feed the strange weapons they had been forced to fight (how had no one noticed?) had disappeared, leaving nothing of emptiness in its place.

He had been aghast, incredulous, *furious*.

And then, he had just been… here.

Wherever this was.

In the depth of some unknown forest, all by themselves.

There was very little potentially dangerous for any of them, even in their current state, especially since Hashirama deemed he was far better off, despite feeling slightly dizzy and a more than a little chakra-drained. He couldn’t remember having used that much chakra in the previous fight; his most powerful jutsu had been out of option due to his disability to verbally cast anything without triggering the seal-device.

Madara was even worse for wear. His eyes had been severely damaged from what he could only describe as chakra-overvoltage. At least, he had stopped their bleeding by now and already had cleaned the Uchiha’s bloodstained cheeks. He could only hope no lasting damage had been dealt by… whatever had happened. His lungs proved to be disastrous once more and the internal bleeding was stopping far less quickly than it should.

Apparently, he had been unable to resist the Voice, in the end, and Madara had been forced to use his eyes to reverse his mistake… but that still didn’t offer even the faintest hint of a clue about how they had gotten to this place. And most of all, how they had gotten here all alone.

The breaths underneath his soothing hands deepened and he allowed himself a heavy sigh. At least Madara had fallen asleep again.

"I am aware of you."

Despite having taken care to keep his voice even and low, Madara's eyes sprung open; still slightly unfocussed. The pupils weren't delating as they should, their reaction was far too slow. That, however, didn't stop his lover's figure from undulating within his lap, as his fair skin turned a few shades darker, his hair shortened and lightened to a dull shade of hazelnut and his face turned far too bland. Hashirama frowned. He shouldn't be using genjutsu just yet, especially one crafted with his Sharingan. His eyes were still far too bruised.

Behind him, two shinobi and a kunoichi appeared. They hadn't been able to circle him yet, as he has taken care to shield Madara with his back as long as possible.

Within his lap, Madara attempted to gather himself.

"I won't bite", Hashirama greeted pleasantly. No need to be hostile, even though Madara would probably disagree once he was able to. He got to his feet, offering Madara a hand, however; the Uchiha merely glared at him (and even his infamous glare had lost its bite, with his now green eyes being unable to focus steadily) and got to his feet by himself. None but Hashirama would be able to make out the slightest hitch in his moves.

Once he was certain Madara was steady, Hashirama finally turned around, facing the three intruders. Maybe they could- "Oh." The Hokage blinked, taken by surprise. "You are from Konoha." Then, he frowned. "I'm afraid I don't recognise any of you." Which was strange, as he made sure to know every single shinobi of their village. Were they camouflaged? No, he deemed after a short check, neither of them glamoured with genjutsu or hidden behind a henge.

"Shoudaime…sama", one of the men breathed after a break far too long and next to him, Madara snorted. "Not the brightest, are they", he muttered, making Hashirama face him.

"Don't be so stern", he chided gently. "After all, I don't recognise them either, Ma-"
"Matsuda", Madara cut in, glaring at him. "I am very aware that is my name, Hokage… sama." Oh, hearing that title from Madara's lips -no matter whether they had lost most of their beauty to genjutsu- went straight to his cock. However; his lover's ever so subtle tumble did not and thus, he faced the unknown Konoha-shinobi once more.

"I'm afraid I don't know where we are", he offered politely. "I can only assume some jutsu on the battlefield went amiss." He frowned. That explanation was everything but satisfactory… but as long as Madara was out of it, he had no idea what had gone wrong -and even worse, whether… "Is Matatabi alright?", he asked, his voice taking an urgent note. "She disappeared and…" He broke off. She had disappeared, her waning chakra being flicked out like a candleflame already struggling against the wind. He had been *furious*, his chakra flaring amok around him, his lips torn as he screamed her name. However; he had been forced to bite back on his wrath as he had woken up within his strange place, Madara being

sprawled out next to him, unconscious and still bleeding out of his closed eyes, his lungs battered enough to nearly fail him.

“I am sorry, Shoudaime-sama”, the kunoichi answered, carefully choosing her words. “I don’t know any Matatabi… but… you might come with us, back to the village. There is… something you should know.”

“I will inform her”, one of the men said, taking one last, hesitating look at Hashirama and bolted off… south, where Konoha should be -or rather had been, when they had been on the battlefield.

For a moment, Hashirama kept silent. Whatever this was, it was bad news. “Should you attempt to overpower any of us, I will not hesitate to kill you”, he clarified, making the two shinobi swallow at the eerie calm of his… not threat, but statement. Madara might be up to take out opponents of average calibre even in his current state, but whoever attempted to get to him wouldn’t be shown Hashirama’s famous mercy. “Lead the way”, he commanded.

The path they set was a fast one and thus, reaching their destination didn’t take long. This was Konohagakure, Hashirama recognised, but at the same time… it wasn’t. At least, it wasn’t *his* Konoha.

This village… no… this city was far larger than the one him and Madara had founded, despite its ever-growing status. Far too many buildings he didn’t recognise, even though the Tower and the Academy were familiar, at least. Such as the mountain his face had been carved into… if it weren’t for the heads next to it. “Tobirama”, he muttered, easily making out his little brother’s features next to his own. But it was the only face he recognised.

Next to him, Madara was silent, deepening Hashirama’s worry about him. He couldn’t ask, not in public where others might overhear.

Swiftly, they were led into the Hokage-Tower, all the way up to the familiar-unfamiliar place he used to work from. Wide-eyed stares were meeting him as they made their way along a short floor, to where he knew- *“Where is he?!”*

A woman’s voice, angry and far too loud.

“I won’t allow *anyone* to disparage him!” Roughly, the door was pushed open, making the wood creak in protest. A woman stormed out, her blond pigtails swinging in angry motion… and her cleavage, too. “Whoever dares to-” She looked up, still furious about whatever, meeting Hashirama’s gaze and stopped, blood draining from her cheeks.

Hashirama smiled. “Rough day?”, he asked, making her stumble back, her glossed mouth opening uselessly.

“Grand…father.”

Hashirama blinked. Then, he tossed his head back, filling the floor with genuine laughter. “Oi, oi”, he protested, still laughing merrily. “I am not yet *that* old.”

“You might as well be”, Madara muttered at his side. “It’s not as though you could get any dumber, dementia or not.”

Hashirama pouted. “That’s cruel”, he muttered, a tiny sad cloud raining above him. However; Madara’s bullying indicated improvement to his wellbeing, making the Shoudaime’s mood brighten mere moments after. He offered a bow. “Senju Hashirama”, he smiled, introducing himself, and if possible, the woman in front of him drained even further of facial colour.

“I… know”, she managed to force out, still shell-shocked and Hashirama couldn’t help but worry. However; before he was able to ask after her wellbeing, she stepped aside. “We should talk… in the office.”

Hashirama nodded, stepping into the room that was so familiar and yet not at all. In a corner -too far from the window- a single bonsai stood, its leaves drooping sadly at the lack of light and water. Without even bothering to take a seat, he strode to the poor plant within its too small pot, caressing the small trunk. Immediately, the little tree’s branches rustled, stretching for the light as its yellow leaves gained colour again. “You should gift the poor thing a new pot”, he advised, caressing the freshly greened leaves one last time. “And some water.”

Refusing to take a seat and instead standing next to where his Kage would sit, Madara rolled his eyes. “You do realise we have bigger problems than your obsession with plant-life?”, he asked, making Hashirama grin cheekily. “The bonsai disagrees.”

Once more, Madara rolled his eyes, before catching Hashirama’s gaze. His irises gleamed red but even without the hint, it was obvious he had been caught within a genjutsu. Easy to break, if he wished to, but hard to interfere with from the outside.

“What is it?”, he asked. It was obvious even to him, Madara intended to talk to him without prying ears.

The Uchiha huffed. “We are trapped within this place, with no idea where we are -or rather… when we are, and you have the decency to ask *that*.”

Hashirama blinked. “When… we are?”, he asked and for the third time, Madara rolled his eyes at him. “Do you even use that excuse of a head or does it just exist to keep the rain outside?”, he asked, before growing serious. “Listen, Hashirama… This is Konohagakure but I don’t have to tell you, it is not ours. This city is far larger than what we even hoped to create, and I am rather certain not even you managed to miss those four heads next to yours on the mountain.” Madara frowned. “This is not genjutsu; if it were, I would have been able to at least detect it by now.” The *despite my current state* went unsaid, but hardly unnoticed. “The last thing I remember is reversing your capture by whatever they used on the battlefield to trap our shinobi. But when I woke up, my chakra reserves were dangerously low -I don’t need to tell you about it- and even yours were harshly diminished. And my eyes… are feeling as though mere moments away from melting. It’s been getting better, but whatever happened has seriously fucked my eyes… and not reversed your capture as intended, but instead-”

“Are you implying what I think you are?”, Hashirama asked, finally frowning as he crossed his arms. “Tobirama would be fascinated.”

“Well, we can’t know for sure, as I can only assume we’ll never see him again if we remain stuck within whatever future timeline you have gotten us into!”

“Me?” Hashirama’s mouth hung open in protest. “But… I am not the one wielding a Mangekyou Sharingan!”

“No, but you’re the one possessing enough chakra to outclass ten Bijuu at once and interfere with my Mangekyou casts”, Madara snapped.

“Your Mangekyou Sharingan reverses the past, it doesn’t have any ability to influence the future.”

“Changing the past *means* to change the future”, the Uchiha answered. “At least considering the past’s future is the present, which I’m sure even you-” He looked up, interrupting himself. “They’re finally trying to dissemble the genjutsu”, he reported, making Hashirama look up in surprise. “They didn’t notice yet?”

Once more, Madara rolled his eyes, but this time it at least wasn’t aimed at him. “Apparently, no. It wasn’t even a strong one.”

Hashirama refrained from mentioning that Madara’s definition of weak still outclassed the general public. “Any ideas about what to do now?”, he asked, making the raven frown, before admitting: “Not yet. I’m still… not at my best.”

Knowing this basically was Madara’s confession of feeling utterly miserable, Hashirama nodded, supressing the urge to kiss his lover’s forehead. “No need to antagonise them”, he then advised. “Release.”

Not even bothering to weave signs, Madara ceased his jutsu, leaving them in front of the large wooden desk once more. The blonde woman scowled at them- at least a change from her earlier stupor. “No genjutsu”, she snapped, making Madara lift one of his currently not slender brows. “If you don’t want me to have private conversations, just undo the jutsu.” Or rather, try and fail pathetically.

A warm hand squeezed his shoulder. “Don’t be like that, Ma-” “Matsuda”, the raven interrupted, glaring at his Kage. The less whoever this was knew of him, the better -at least until he could be certain of her intents.

“You are still casting”, the woman growled.

“You are welcome to undo the jutsu”, he retorted. “If you are able, that is.”

She gritted her teeth. “I can’t consider you honest if you refuse to release the jutsu!”

“What a shame”, he drawled. “Neither can I.”

Hashirama sighed heavily, interrupting the dispute. “We’re not even ten minutes in and you already pissed off our host.”

“You already molested a tree.”

Once more, Hashirama’s laughter echoed between them, his face a picture of mirth. “Then I guess we both did what we do best”, he grinned, turning back to the blonde woman. “If he decides to keep the jutsu active, there’s little you can do about it”, he apologised. He himself might be able to force it undone… but he couldn’t think of anyone else, at least not if Madara truly didn’t wish to. “You’ll just have to deal with me, if you won’t trust him.”

She opened her mouth to answer, but before she was able to, the door flung open.

“Tsunade-sama, I heard of-”

Another woman rushed inside. Her black, short hair and fair skin might hint hailing of the Uchiha-clan, but Madara’s instinct told him she was not of his people.

It mattered little, as she stumbled back as the moment she had seen Hashirama. “Shoudaime…sama”, she gasped, making Tsunade’s -as that probably was her name- eyes turn at her. “Close the door”, she ordered and quickly, the newcomer obeyed.

Hashirama blinked. “Is that… a pig?”, he asked, and before any of them were able to answer, his laughter sounded once more. “Wonderful”, he then grinned. “We should get one, too! Just look at the necklace!”

“You’d just gamble it away, moron.”

“The pig or the necklace?”, Hashirama asked, still grinning wide.

“Both!”, Madara snapped. Then, he finally turned back to Tsunade, who was still standing behind her desk. “If my assuming is correct, you are Konoha’s Fifth Kage?”, he half-asked and to his surprise, she nodded.

“I am the Fifth Hokage, Senju Tsunade”, she assessed, her eyes fixed on Hashirama.

The Shoudaime couldn’t help but frown. Five faces had been carved into the mountain so far and counting in his and Tobirama’s that already made three Senju. This position wasn’t meant to be claimed by his clan only. “I don’t recognise you”, he confessed. “Who are your parents?” Maybe he would know them, so he could at least be familiar with her background.

Tsunade’s lips thinned and it was rather obvious she was carefully deliberating her answer. Madara’s eyes narrowed. This wasn’t- “Tsunade-hime is your granddaughter, Shoudaime-sama!”

As soon as the words had been blurted out, the black-haired woman clasped her hands at her mouth, obviously mortified her herself for calling out their relationship.

Hashirama blinked, dumbfounded by the news. “Oh.” He hesitated. “I… hope I was a good grandfather to you?”, he then asked awkwardly. “If I… lived that long, it is.” Which was by

no means certain, not even for him.

Tsunade's lower lip wobbled for a moment, only stopping as she dug her teeth into it.

"You were the best grandfather any child could hope to have", she then answered, her voice serious and Madara could see that she meant it. Then, she gathered herself. "You shouldn't be here", she said and Hashirama nodded. "You're right, we shouldn't. We don't even know how; we can only assume that whatever happened during the battle forced Madara's Mangekyou to-" At the sound of his lover's name, the woman behind him gasped.

"Uchiha… Madara?", she asked weakly and Hashirama nodded without acknowledging her strange behaviour. If his granddaughter was now Hokage, he could only assume enough years had passed to have death claim both, him and Madara, turning them into little more than names on a gravestone. "Neither of us can remember what happened exactly; we were unconscious and came to us not too far from the village. Whatever happened, cost us immense amounts of chakra." He frowned. "My reserves are still low, but at least Ma… tsuda's have improved enough to not be threatening anymore."

Behind them, Shizune gasped once more. This was… this was the Shoudaime being *low on chakra?!* There was so much of it, even Tsunade-hime's reserves paled compared to it! That amount of chakra seemed to be able to smash a mountain by sheer will alone and he claimed to be low? She knew of the Shoudaime's legacy, of course. The very first Kami no Shinobi, his battle prowess unmatched, the only one being able to stand up to him the infamous Uchiha Madara, who had turned traitor to the village.

Tsunade at least didn't appear to be too anxious over the legendary Uchiha's name. "Might it have been his intention to remove you from the battlefield?", she asked and Hashirama frowned. "I'd rather say his intentions have been getting me *back* to the battlefield", he corrected. Why would she consider…? However; a sudden question interrupted his line of thought. "If I am your grandfather, who is your grandmother?", he asked and Tsunade hesitated for a moment, before proudly lifting her chin.

"Uzumaki Mito."

Hashirama's mouth fell open. "Oh! That means he agreed to-"

Tsunade didn't get to know who agreed to what exactly, since in a move far too fast to anticipate, the brunet man swung around and within a cloud of dust, the First Hokage smashed through the tower's massive wall.

Before anyone else was able to react, long roots broke out of the ground, catching Hashirama's fall as to not let him tumble all the many floors to the ground. Within seconds, the First Hokage leapt back through the hole his impact had created.

"You ripped my liver", he pouted and Madara glared at him, but at least he didn't make any attempt in rupturing further internal organs. "Serves you right!"

"If me and Mito had children, it means you agreed at some point to-" "And that is the sole reason I didn't rip your fucking throat, too!", Madara bellowed. "Not that you wouldn't

survive it.”

Eyes blown wide, Shizune could only stare as within seconds, the cuts on the Hokage’s cheek disappeared, leaving only a few drops of blood as proof they had ever happened.

Then, Hashirama sighed. “I’m sorry”, he apologised. “He has a temper.”

Chapter End Notes

If that fucker Sasuke can screw time, bet your ass Madara can, too... except he didn't intend to and certainly didn't do it alone *Uhhh Spooky Spoiler*
Also I kinda noticed Tsunade has far more of Madara's temper than Hashirama's, even in canon.
Fun Fact: If you search for "Tsunade pig" on Google because you can't remember the pig's name, you'll get pictures of TenTen. I really don't know what to think of that.

Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

> Hashirama's a nice guy.
> Madara's not.

Chapter Notes

> I merely want you to notice how we NEVER saw any other Senju than Tsunade in canon-Konoha.
> Thus, taking my duty as a fanfic-writer seriously, I came to my own conclusions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Any sign of them yet?"

"None. The Sensor-Units are unable to pick up even a trace."

That had been expected. If he himself was unable to make out anything, it was highly unlikely anyone else would be more successful, even though this was one of the few times he would have wished to be proven wrong.

"They are not to cross the border. We can't risk spreading our forces too thin", he commanded. The Nara in front of him nodded, before jumping off.

The constant frown had carved deep lines into his face, as Tobirama turned back to his older brother's desk. Out of all the turns the battle could have taken, this was basically second worst to the Hashirama's (and Madara's) death. Not that they currently could exclude that possibility… but that was a thought he didn't wish to dwell on, at least not as long as the possibility didn't get any more likely than his brother returning within the hour with a big smile of his goofy face.

The sound of the opening door distracted him from his rather unpleasant thoughts, and he looked up.

"You should be resting."

All but ignoring the remark, Izuna carefully made his way across the room, leaning on the table. "Still nothing?", he asked and Tobirama shook his head, before thinking better of it, and answering: "Not even a trace. How about you?"

“I’ve been better”, the Uchiha answered, touching the white bandages wrapped around his head. “I never thought I’d say it, but I really miss your brother right now.” His eyes were killing him -metaphorical, not physical -at least, not yet- and even though the medics tried their best, there was little good it had done.

The moment Mito had released the seals secured behind the barrier at the battlefield, even he had been able to determinate Matatabi’s chakra as the source of power. Immediately, he had taken a time-leap, attempting to make way to the Bijuu and release her -or at least prevent further treatment of… whatever it was, they had done to her. It hadn’t even been too far, just a little to the north-east, a place carefully hidden from their sensors, until its seal that had been broken alongside the one Mito had taken care of.

And then, it had all gone wrong.

Something had… ripped, there really was no other way to describe it, and instead of arriving where -or rather, when- he should have, he had found himself on the middle of the battlefield, screaming in pain as his eyes burned as though lit aflame and he had felt his cheeks grow wet with blood.

If it hadn’t been for the Sarutobi medic who had had the presence of mind to disconnect his eye-nerves for the time being, he was rather certain he’d gone mad with pain. Therefore, he currently felt as useful as a wagon’s fifth wheel, with little hope to quickly improve the situation. Especially since he, unlike his older brother, had little talent as a sensor and thus was far less independent with the current loss of his eyesight.

At least, they had been able to retreat in order, since Kumogakure’s forces had scattered upon the loss of their chakra-source and what little remained of the Uzumaki who had accompanied them had run off, as well. Konohagure’s losses had been minimal; a total of four shinobi. When they had still been at war with the Uchiha, they often the very amount upon a single battle, counting their own clan only.

Tobirama could only hope they wouldn’t have to add their brothers to the count.

“I’m sorry”, Hashirama apologised. “He has a temper.”

Shizune couldn’t do but stare, as the God of Shinobi laughed loudly, as though just having been told some kind of joke. “You should have been there when I first ki-” He yelped, interrupting himself as the other man stomped at his foot sharp enough to bruise the toes. “What was that for?”, the Shoudaime whined -whined!- and the other man didn’t even spare him a glance, as he answered: “That is no one’s business.”

“You kicked me through three buildings!”

“You would’ve deserved at least four.”

“Mean”, the First Hokage pouted and waved a hand at his companion’s general direction, before he turned back to Tsunade once more. “Well”, he started, looking at her expectantly.

“Since we’re already here: How is the village going? It’s so much larger than ours; I can’t believe how many people have been united!”

Carefully, Tsunade stapled her hands, considering her answer. “The village is prospering”, she finally said. “We are financially stable and despite the growing number of civilians settling in, there’s still far enough children attending the Academy to-” *”Oh”*,Hashirama interrupted, a beaming smile on his face. “The Academy still exists? So Tobirama was right about it!”

“Lord Second-”

“Tsunade.” There was nothing, no title, no honorific as the other man interrupted her, his blandness far too rude considering whom he was talking to. “You might be able to talk Hashirama into stupor -even though that hardly is a special feat; any six-year old could.” Ignoring the Shoudaime’s protests, the strange man continued, leaving no room for interruptions. “But unfortunately for you -and rather lucky for him- I am far harder to be fooled. If this village is prospering as you say… Why is the only Uchiha-chakra within these borders a child’s? And the only Senju chakra… yours?” And even that one was watered down, as she had claimed herself to be no pure-blood Senju before.

At that, Hashirama stopped, his joyous expression giving way to a deep frown. There was no reason to doubt Madara’s words; he was a Sensor easily able to identify chakra-sources dozens of miles away and even despite being terrible at the art himself, Hashirama was very aware being able to identify a shinobi’s clan due to their chakra-signature was anything but uncommon. Tobirama was effortlessly able to do the same.

“Do not lie to us.” Madara’s words were strangely mild and before Hashirama was able to cut in, he continued: “You might not like the consequences.”

The Fifth Hokage’s brown eyes narrowed. “Is that a threat?”, she asked, however, before he was able to answer, Hashirama cut in. “Tsunade.” It felt strange to address her that familiarly, but he supposed if he was indeed her grandfather, it was fitting. “What happened?”

Again, Tsunade carefully chose her words, before starting to speak. “The Senju… have intermarried within other clans. Their blood still exists but the clan itself… has been lost. I am the last Senju, and when I will die, the clan-name dies with me.”

Hashirama blinked.

His clan was… gone? His granddaughter was the last of their name, apparently without children, and it was just… gone? His whole clan, the Senju, just gone… never to come back. Yes, he had hoped for the clans to root themselves within the village, to overcome differences, but… *“Seeking stability, one God was divided into Yin and Yang, these opposing two acting together obtain all things in creation.”* He looked up, meeting Madara’s frowning face. “What?”, Hashirama asked, his voice strangely numb.

“The Stone Tablet”, the Uchiha clarified, his facial features carefully controlled in an extremely unfamiliar example of self-composure. “I have studied all of it, as far as I was able to-” Which was quite a lot, Hashirama knew, “And…” Madara hesitated, obviously

considering casting another gen-jutsu for private conversation, however; at Hashirama's slight shake of head, refrained from antagonizing their current host even further.

"The Sage -the God- had two sons… which could be interpreted as dividing himself into Yin and Yang. From what we know, Ashura founded the Senju-clan, while Indra formed the Uchiha. These two clans have always been the strongest, battling for power."

This time, it was Hashirama who frowned. "This isn't the first time you consider this", he noted.

"But the first time I realise its full extend", Madara answered. "Hashirama, just use that wooden brain of yours for once. If the Uchiha and Senju are indeed the God's -the Sage's- Yin and Yang, they are dependent on each other in a way neither of us ever considered!"

And at that, the Shoudaime finally understood. Yin and Yang were equals. Not necessarily enemies, but maybe opponents. Without Yin, however, no Yang could exist. And without Yang, Yin was impossible. "If one clan falls, the other is unable to exist, too", he whispered, the realisation strange on his tongue. "Our clans have been at war ever since, so neither of us even knew any other state than constant decay", Madara agreed, his forehead crumbled into an unhappy frown.

"I remember one autumn", Hashirama murmured, strangely absent. "A battle had been going horrible for you, your clan lost more than twenty. Father celebrated our victory… but when winter stroke, the Senju lost two dozen to some strange illness neither of us had ever suffered from before, or after." Sharply, he rose his gaze. "This isn't a proof, though."

"It's not", Madara agreed. "But it lines up with my own expectations. When the Senju clan decayed, so did the Uchiha -or the other way round, depending on who started the cycle."

"You are an Uchiha, then", Tsunade finally spoke up again, her narrowed eyes resting upon him and with a jerk, as though only now remembering they weren't alone, Madara faced her again, lifting one of his eyebrows -not slender and elegant but rather thick, nearly grown together above his nose thanks to the jutsu hiding his body.

"What gave me away?", he drawled. "The fact you were unable to undo my gen-jutsu, or the fact I didn't bother to hide it, after you revealed to Hashirama *his clan went extinct*… either after, or before mine did, as well?" He didn't ask, didn't think he would be able to endure the knowledge of how exactly his clan had been killed off by some strange sickness, or slowly trickled out of existence alongside the Senju. His eyes burned and for a moment he wasn't certain whether the feeling hailed from unshed tears or was just an intensity of the pain still lingering ever since he had woken up, alongside the everlasting exhaustion.

Hashirama shook his head, still shell-shocked. "When we founded Konoha, I always dreamed of the clans uniting, setting aside their differences for the greater good. But I never imagined…" And in how little time! If this woman was indeed his grand-daughter, their clans had nullified within decades; far faster than during the war even! "I… think I need some time", he finally confessed.

Madara would deny it with all he had in him, but as soon as they were alone, he basically fainted from exhaustion.

Tsunade had taken them to a large apartment, as a place to stay and get accustomed to… well, the loss of his clan. Madara wasn't off much better but Hashirama knew he'd refuse to deal with his feelings on the matter until later. Whenever he decided that was.

Since all of them agreed how making the First Hokage's presence public was a disastrous idea, he had cast a henge, easily blending in with the crowd, as Tsunade led them to their place for the time being, a large apartment neither too far, nor too close to where he suspected the village's centre was located. He didn't harbour any illusions they wouldn't be supervised.

Underneath his gen-jutsu, he had felt Madara tremble and as soon as they finally were alone, Hashirama closed the curtains tightly. "Off with that", he ordered quietly and Madara's instant obedience was proof enough of his sorry state, as he released the gen-jutsu. It shouldn't be that bad; he had pumped enough chakra into his lover's metabolism to keep even his extraordinary reserves somewhat filled. However; as he laid a glowing palm onto his forehead, he couldn't help but frown. "You're burning up. Lie down, this'll take some work."

Once more, Madara didn't argue and as Hashirama carefully turned the raven's face to meet his, he could easily see the red, enflamed eyes. Carefully, he covered the right one -the worse one- with his palm, while the other rested upon Madara's feverish forehead, as his lover got down on the couch cushions.

His chakra-reserves were still low, even though he had managed to fill them up with nature energy at least somewhat before they had been interrupted by the Konoha-shinobi. However; most of it had gone into restoring Madara's dangerously low reserves, rather than diagnosis - especially since he had never made one as this, as he finally realised: "The chakra-connection to your left eye ruptured; the chakra's flowing uncontrolled right into you iris." He hadn't even known something like that was possible before, as he had simply soothed the strained flesh. This, however, explained both, Madara's chakra-loss upon the simple cast of a gen-jutsu as well as the state of his eye. "The right one's off a little better; just strained. I'll try to mend the rupture, keep your eyes closed."

For a while, Madara remained silent, as he allowed Hashirama to treat him. Telling him to tone it down to save his own low reserves would only be met with stubborn refusal and for once, he didn't have it in him to bicker.

"There's a shitton of Hyuuga here", he finally muttered and Hashirama frowned. "Stop kneading chakra, you're supposed to rest."

The Uchiha snorted and even that sounded weak. "Don't even need to, their Byakugan is rubbing it right in my face."

Hashirama smiled, still carefully cradling his lover's head. "At least their presence means they agreed to stop their sealing-practise." Otherwise, neither him nor Madara would have agreed to allow the Hyuuga to join the village -and he couldn't really imagine Tobirama would, either.

However; underneath him, Madara frowned. “I am not that certain.”

Hashirama startled, for a moment stopping his gentle chakra infusion. “What?”

The raven opened his eyes, black depths searching his. “Haven’t you noticed? It’s not only that our clans are gone. Neither is it that at least three Hokage have been Senju.” Ah, Hashirama thought. So Madara *had* noticed, as well. It was a relief, that his mind was clear, despite his protesting body. But well, considering Madara’s story of sickness before the foundation of Konoha, his lover was far too accustomed to keeping a clear mind despite his body’s sorry state. “This village… feels wrong.”

Hashirama blinked. “Wrong?”, he repeated, strengthening the chakra infusion after having mended to ruptured systems, gently urging the lids to close once more. “I’m not sure I can follow.”

“Our clans are gone”, the raven repeated, his voice dropping to a tired murmur. “How is that *not* wrong?”

Gently, Hashirama soothed a stubborn stand of raven hair out of his lover’s face. “What matters is the village”, he said. “If it prospers-” *”Idiot!”*, Madara sharply cut in, his eyes opening again. “It’s the people that make the village, not the other way round. Without the people, Konoha is meaningless!”

For a moment, Hashirama’s mouth hung open, taken aback by the force of his lover’s words. Then, however, he smiled, caressing Madara’s pale cheek. “You’ve always been the smart one, love.”

The Uchiha huffed, allowing his eyes to slip close as the haze of sleep finally washed over him. “Don’t you forget that.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter's far too short, but I finally wanted to offer at least something... I'm so sorry for my recently fucked up excuse for what never really has been a real shedule in the first place.

On this side: My biggest Thanks to every single one of you who comments and offers Kudos! Without you, this story would be at a loss.

Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

In which Madara deserves an Oscar.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"How many?"

Not bothering to move his head out of the gentle cradle of Hashirama's hands and the soothing chakra-infusion, Madara hummed. "Six. Maybe seven but that one might be coincidence."

The night had done well to both of them. Despite shallow, they both had slept until far after sunrise and while Madara's chakra had stabilised, Hashirama's had improved far beyond any critical point. Sharing some of it had been the only logical consequence and Madara had well known the stubborn Senju wouldn't take a No for an answer and for once didn't bother arguing.

They had even been delivered a breakfast Madara had deemed far too opulent until Hashirama had eaten every crump of it, as soon as Madara had refused to stuff himself even further.

"So", the Shoudaime started, after smoothing Madara's black, unruly hair from his forehead. "What are we going to do?"

"There's nothing much we *can* do, without further information", the Uchiha deemed, sitting up. The both of them had taken their armour off for sleeping as to avoid soreness, instead resting back to back as to protect each other's necks. Now, however, Madara re-donned the red breast-plates and within a moment, Hashirama had gotten up to help him with the buckles. A few moments later, it was the raven helping him, as neither of them felt the need to go wandering about this village that wasn't theirs without the protecting layer of metal.

Within a blink, Madara's figure disappeared underneath the by now familiar gen-jutsu.

"I'll shake off my baby-sitters and take a look around the village. You'll be best off talking to Tsunade, we didn't get too far yesterday, after all."

"Flare your chakra if anything happens", Hashirama warned, however, the Uchiha merely rolled his eyes. "I'm low on reserves, not halfway-dead. I'll manage."

Unfortunately, he didn't seem to be overly convincing. "Shouldn't I be going around the village and you look for Tsunade?", Hashirama asked, however; received a burning glare in answer. His eyes' current muddy colour lessened their usual black sting but the message still came across. "She is *your* granddaughter… and don't think we've talked about *that* for the last time!" With that, Madara slammed open the door and took a deep breath, inhaling the crisp morning air. The day promised to be a warm one.

As expected, four of their -to name it nicely- guards followed him, keeping in the shadows and expertly hiding their chakra.

Unfortunately for them, Madara was the better expert at sensing it.

Had they been ordered to merely shadow him or to attempt to stop him once he ventured too far into the village? He didn't know but found neither option very agreeable. Hashirama would be off easier, he supposed. He could either immediately make his way to the Kage-Tower or ask the remaining guards to take him to Tsunade. Of course, that would expose their advantage of being aware of the watching shinobi that way; the fool was far too considerate of others for his own good. However; once Hashirama's guards were aware of their attempt at secrecy not being successful, they would either be giving up or confront him about- his foot slipped and with a curse, he tumbled down right next to a currently empty ramen-stand, the fall taking him stumbling aside and just behind it, crashing into the wooden planks.

"Fucking shit", he cursed. "You've got to be kidding me!"

Ramen.

He had slipped on spilled noodles. How old was he? Three? Still cursing, he straightened himself, patting off some dust and threw one last sour glance at the spilled food that had caused the accident.

The village's centre couldn't be too far off, he mused, as he walked on. There weren't too many people milling in the streets, at least not yet. No doubt most of them would soon begin their day. Maybe he should visit the Academy and see how things had developed there… After all, with the village this large, they would have needed to expand it at some point.

"Matsuda-san."

Ah.

He turned around, facing one of the four people shadowing him. A kunoichi, her face unrecognisable due to the mask she was wearing. A rat… who would even choose a rat-mask? Maybe to cover a mousy face, he thought, huffing quietly at the thought. "What is it?", he asked.

"I am sorry, Matsuda-san." She didn't sound sorry at all, not that he gave a fuck. "You aren't allowed to depart any further from your house unaccompanied."

"But I do have company, don't I?", he drawled. "Four of them, if I'm not mistaken." No use in delaying it even further.

A moment passed, then the other three joined them on the street. More masks, he noted. A snake, a bear and… an otter? An ugly one, for sure.

“So, you have noticed us”, the bear said. The voice was male and the hair a stunning shade of purple, not hidden underneath any jutsu. How useless masking one’s face and not bothering to hide hair that obvious.

“I’ll assume neither of us are supposed to move around too much”, he hummed, “And your job is supervising and only stepping in once any of us move too far.”

No answer. Then: “Please return to your apartment, Matsuda-san.”

A chuckle answered him and a grin just the side of maniac. “I don’t think I will. What are you going to do about it?”

The senbon puncturing his neck wasn’t lethal; far from it. Thrown with uttermost precision and speed, it was just enough to render him unconscious, as to carry him back to the apartment the other man -hidden underneath a henge Tsunade had ordered them not to break- had recently left, according to the constant exchange of information with the other team-members.

The man in front of them chuckled as he dragged the needle out of his skin, but it was useless, as the liquid coating it had already entered his system. He would be out cold within seconds. “Remember to keep the streets clean”, he grinned and then… the senbon fell to the ground, as the figure popped out of existence in a burst of hot ashes and smoke.

“No”, one of the ANBU whispered aghast, frantically picking up the only thing left of the man they had been tasked to overwatch.

A single chair, obviously belonging to a ramen-stand.

Within a crowd bustling around in morning activity, a by now dark blonde man snorted. If *that* was what Tsunade considered supervising, even Izuna would laugh at it. Seriously, he had expected having to knock at least… he didn’t even know what he had expected but not that. Every kid knew that breaking sight with the target for just a blink could be enough for unpredictable results. Yes, normally the creation of a clone was noticeable due to the caster’s chakra-infusion. But even though his casting had been perfectly timed, the flare so flickering it was nearly unnoticeable with the clatter of wood, only an idiot wouldn’t even bother checking.

He could just hope the village hadn’t turned into a pool of incompetence, otherwise he’d have to personally beat sense into them.

While he wandered about, his eyes stopped at a flower-store prominently located at the main-street. Who would even consider paying for flowers when they literally grew everywhere? And above all, who even had the money to even consider something that stupid?! (Hashirama would if he couldn’t just grow every fucking plant on the planet himself, probably). And

while he couldn't remember ever seeing something more ridiculous, he couldn't supress a smile. A flower-store in a shinobi village… he could just hope this was an omen for Konoha's development. If he had had money with him, he'd even consider buying something for Hashirama; the fool would love it.

The weapon-shops he found further down the street were far closer to his expectations, and the bookstore was an addition they should consider making soon, as well. In his childhood, there hadn't been much to read other than weapon scrolls.

And the children.

So many children; laughing, chasing each other down the street, holding their parents' hands… happy. Alive. A little girl (four perhaps, no older than five) dragged her father to a shop-window, excitedly pointing at the displayed kunai. He shook his head at her and even from the distance, he could hear her begging, as her father declined.

Good.

She was way too young to start training yet.

The soft beginnings of murmuring caught his attention and he looked away from the girl. The whisperings were… difficult to order. Some were simply excited, some hushed murmurings nearly hateful, others even claimed to be "happy to see him".

It took him a while, to be able to spot the centre of attention and once he did, he couldn't help but frown.

It was a boy. His bright blonde hair and striking blue eyes made him easily distinguishable and Madara could only hope his orange clothes were meant to confuse enemies in battle. He had just grown out of childhood and couldn't be much older than twelve. He was carrying two bags of groceries.

Madara's frown deepened, as he overheard just another hushed whisper, claiming the boy to be a monster.

There was something about him. The echo of… Madara just couldn't put his finger on it, even though *knowing* he was just a hair's width from realising, and yet unable to name what it was he could feel.

A flicker of chakra, unnoticeable by anyone but Sensors of his own level, and one of the bags melted up at the bottom, just as Madara walked past the boy, causing it to rip and the groceries to fall to the ground. The peaches were beyond hope; crushed underneath two cans of beans.

"Oh, my!" Madara picked up a few cans, some bottles before they could roll off, and a bag of rice (low quality, he couldn't help but notice).

The boy had by now picked up an armful of groceries from the street himself, eyes searching for further dropped items. He managed to put some tomatoes into the second bag, but his

arms were still full, and he struggled to carry the packages and fruit.

“Sorry”, the boy apologised, however; Madara shrugged. “Happens to the best of us. How about your bag?” Beyond repair and Madara was very aware of it, but pretending would be useful.

The boy glanced at it, obviously coming to the same conclusion. “That sucks, man!”, he complained, but then sighed. “Thanks for the help. Just put the stuff to the side, I’ll get them when I brought these home… I just don’t have enough arms, dang!”

Madara shrugged. “I don’t have places to be, and we already got everything… I don’t think you’ll still want those peaches. I might as well just help you get this home.”

The boy blinked. Once. Twice. Then, he beamed. “Awesome! Thank you!”

As the boy lead the way, excitedly bubbling about something Madara didn’t have the mind to pay attention to, he had to supress a snort. This had even been easier than fooling those laughable excuses of supervisors… and he didn’t even have to get to the death-threats.

Unlike his lover, Hashirama had far less qualms about having a bunch of shinobi follow him, as he made his way back to the Kage-Tower, a few minutes after Madara had left -and conveniently had forgotten to do the dishes. Hashirama wouldn’t lie; standing in front of the sink and drying plates within his battle-armour had been weird.

Now, however, he enjoyed the city bustling around in morning-activity. Children were running about, parents chatting, shinobi walking side by side with each other.

And still, underneath all that, Madara’s warning words festered like an untreated wound, ever nagging. *This village… feels wrong.*

Yesterday, Madara’s stubbornness had made talking to the current Kage much more difficult (his granddaughter… he still hadn’t gotten used to it) but he hoped to get some more information on his own. And besides that, they needed to pounder about how him and Madara would be able to reverse… whatever jutsu it was, that had brought them here. They had left in the middle of battle, after all, and while he had uttermost faith in their brothers to deal with the fallout, he still would have preferred to be with them.

A few vendors on the main-street offered breakfast and even though he had had eaten, he really wished for some money to try something. He couldn’t possibly ask his guards though; that really wouldn’t be part of their job-description. With a last sad glance at the offered treats, he made his way to the Kage-Tower, not bothering with what he assumed was the registration (he really should include that as soon as he made it back home!)

When he made his way upwards, no one cared to stop him and a few minutes later, he swiftly knocked at the current Hokage’s office-door.

Shizune was the one to open it for him and aside from her and Tsunade sitting behind the large desk over-flowing with papers (he knew that feel), the room was empty. Apparently, nobody else had been filled in completely. Madara would be glad, probably.

“Good morning”, he greeted, considering to drop his henge but ultimately deciding against it. If this was anything like his own poor excuse of a private office, it was only a matter of time before the current equivalent of Tobirama walked in… or that of Izuna. Kakuzu not so much, the assassin just simply administrated all budget-concerns on his own, anyway. Better to be safe than sorry, he presumed. Also, the office’s large window-front made it the more reasonable choice anyway.

“Good morning, Shoudaime-sama”, Shizune parroted, making him laugh a little sheepishly. “Oh, none of that”, he answered, waving it off. “I’m not really one for titles in private.” Neither in public, but he had gotten enough scolding by both, Tobirama and Madara, to refer to himself as the Hokage in official contexts by now.

“Good morning… Hashirama.” The last word was spoken carefully and the Shoudaime couldn’t help but smile at his granddaughter. “No need to be insecure about it. We *are* related, after all”, he said. “I hope you were able to get some sleep despite the situation.”

“Enough to get by”, was her answer and Hashirama was used enough to Madara’s antics to correctly interpret it as ‘Basically nothing’. That, however, reminded him… “Would you consider dropping the guards around the apartment, though? Mad…suda had trouble sleeping through the night with them ‘Lurking around’”- the quotation marks were obvious- “And he really needs the rest.”

Next to the door, Shizune once more was forced to swallow with the Shoudaime’s oblivious confession of power. The seven ANBU Tsuname-hime had ordered with surveillance had been specifically chosen as they were specialized in stealth-missions… there was no way they could have been sensed by anyone *sleeping* of all things!

“I cannot drop the ANBU, as long as I am unable to trust Matsuda-san”, Tsunade interrupted her thoughts, making Hashirama frown at her, before a grin split his face (even with the henge covering his features, it was just as beaming as ever). “Ohhh, ANBU!”, he exclaimed. “So Tobirama’s idea *did* work out!” It had been one of many; the plan of naming specialised shinobi for missions of uttermost priority (and danger). With everything else going on, none of them had been able to seriously think about it, though. “If you won’t drop them, at least choose someone more adapted in stealth”, he asked, completely oblivious about the depth of it or the fact Shizune next to him paled even further. Thankfully, both of them were saved from answering, as the Shoudaime once more changed topics. “Were you able to find anything?”

Yesterday, they had agreed for Tsunade to initiate an archive-search. Maybe they’d find something, anything, helpful for their current situation. After all, decades had passed since Hashirama’s own present-time… who knew what kind of jutsu and techniques had developed since then.

Unfortunately, Tsunade shook her head. “We spent all night searching. There are still some parts left, but… we’ve found nothing of use, so far. The only interesting scrolls have been

written by Lord Second, however; he has sealed all of his more detailed research."

Hashirama groaned, rubbing his forehead. "That's like him; always keeping everything secure. I don't even want to know what him and Izuna are up to all the time", he complained. Why couldn't he, just this once, have kept open record about his research? It wasn't as though there were many shinobi even able to work with whatever his genius brain came up with. "The Uzumaki might-" He didn't get to finish his suggestion about the Uzumaki being able to handle the seals Tobirama had put upon his research.

One of the windows opened and a masked figure entered, bowing in greeting -and apology. "Tsunade-sama. You ordered to be informed about any events without delay… We have been informed by Squad Beta that Matsuda-san has managed to escape the surveillance."

Underneath Tsunade's hands, a sheet of probably important paperwork crumbled. "How did he-" "Are you of the ANBU?" Hashirama didn't care about interrupting Tsunade and this time, his gaze wasn't upon her. Instead, his frown was directed at the newcomer.

The shinobi didn't answer.

"Tsunade." For once, Hashirama's voice had… an edge. He would not be ignored and he would not step down. Not from this. And fortunately, Tsunade knew her grandfather well enough to notice his change, even though she did not fully understand what had brought it forth.

"He is", she therefore answered and finally, Hashirama's hard gaze turned onto her.

"Then tell me, Tsunade, why he is just a child."

Chapter End Notes

Sooo... I recently learned about what happened to Kurama in Boruto and I am SO glad I stopped considering Boruto canon after around five episodes or something.
Naruto won at his exams by farting into faces and Boruto goes around throwing fucking Rasengans. Sure, why not. Let's make the power-levels even MORE ridiculous even though that was the reason Madara got such a laughable end in the Fourth War's climax. Because Kishimoto stated himself he couldn't come up with a way to defeat him. Obviously, no lesson was learned from that, so yeah. I just wanted to tell you I basically consider Boruto Kishimoto's fanfic to his own manga... and it's worse than half the stuff published over here.

Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Two guys being very unhappy.
Just wait 'till they'll be able to talk with each other about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The apartment was small and as Madara put down the groceries onto the kitchen table, he casually asked: “You live alone?”

Next to him, the boy nodded. “It’s awesome”, he answered cheerfully. “Sakura-chan’s parents are really strict sometimes, but I can do what I want! The old man tended to visit, once in a while, but with him gone…”

The old man. Probably a grandfather or an older uncle, Madara thought. However; he couldn’t inquire too hard without raising suspicions. It didn’t really matter though, the boy had given him all the information currently needed. He was alone and no one would enter unbiddenly -at least not without giving Madara more than enough time to react and retreat.

“Thank you for the help! I really-” The boy didn’t even have a chance to realise what happened, before his eyes turned glassy and his head fell forward ever so slightly. He wouldn’t even remember anything had happened the split-second his eyes had met Madara’s swirling Sharingan.

He was a good boy, of that Madara didn’t have any doubts and he wouldn’t dig around in his memories more than he had to. The loneliness echoed within his very being, the abandonment by… no, Madara wouldn’t shuffle through these personal memories, no matter how it angered him that within their village, a child was left behind like this.

He searched deeper within the boy’s subconsciousness, but not knowing what exactly he was looking for didn’t make it any easier -at least if he wouldn’t want to leave any lasting damage within this young mind. Wracking havoc would certainly bring forth the answers he was seeking, but unfortunately also mentally cripple the child for the rest of his life.

He could still feel it, though. The presence of… something, right beneath the surface, echoing into the boy’s subconsciousness. A burning… hatred, that didn’t feel like it belonged to the cheerful boy. As though the world’s anger and hatred had been sealed away, overlapped by- his thoughts did a doubletake and he cursed his own obliviousness. Was he Hashirama?!

Unfortunately, he was no sealing expert, but he would start with the basics. Search the seal. Popular places were back and chest. His tomoe rotated once and the boy started removing the

bright jacket, revealing a simple white shirt underneath. As soon as his upper body was bared, the boy stopped moving and Madara carefully began examining his back. A few minor scars, all healed neatly and nearly invisible. A pimple that wasn't indicating anything other than the start of puberty. A few freckles… and that was it. No seal, however well hidden. No matter its quality, a seal was never able to seal itself. No matter how well placed, its mere existence was a dead giveaway to anyone knowing what to search for.

He turned to the boy's chest. At least he was properly nourished, other than Madara and so many other children during the war. Having the child walk around with two bags of food would have gotten his throat slit by the first shinobi he'd face, back in war-times.

A few minutes later, Madara frowned. If not at his back, he would have expected to find the seal onto the boy's chest, most probably right above his heart. The forehead was often used for sealing-practise as well, however; it was more symbolic than anything else. And more complex seals would need more space.

Once more, his eyes scanned the boy's chest and it was the glint of red, that finally caught his attention right before he would have moved onto the boy's forehead. His eyes roamed deeper and, using a finger, he forced the seal to surface with a pointed flare of chakra.

With a flicker that seemed nearly unwilling, the red seal showed itself onto the boy's skin, nearly taking in his entire abdomen. Madara felt his slim eyebrows rise. *That* was one hell of a seal… and if it wasn't Uzumaki-made, he'd eat a tree-branch… Hashirama's cock not counting. The whirl was a giveaway he'd gladly bet on.

"Well then, you brat", he murmured. "What have you gotten in there?"

No way in hell did the boy do this himself. Seal-work as this required decades of experience and research. Whoever had put the seal onto the boy, it hadn't been the child himself. Madara doubted even he himself would be able to break the seal, and he certainly wouldn't put the boy at risk to try.

However; seals, no matter how strong or brilliantly crafted, had one certain weakness: They were either created to keep something inside… or outside. A seal's barriers were always aimed at one certain direction, leaving them open for approaches from the other.

Madara rarely was impressed by anything other than Hashirama's insane battle-might (and the stupid Senju often enough squashed that by being a total moron five minutes later). However; he was able to admit that this seal was indeed impressive. His Sharingan swirled and he huffed, before his Mangekyou glowed brightly red, finally forcing his way behind the crafted work.

He heard… dripping.

Water dripping and underneath his feet, the stone floor was covered by it, steadily fed from whatever source he heard.

Slowly, he walked on, making his way towards the actual sealing-core… and whatever it held in stock.

He knew he'd almost made it when the large metal gates came into view, its doors being held close by the original seal that had been branded onto the boy's abdomen. These gates where the actual seal and whatever was behind it… he stepped forward, his fingers tracing the slip of paper, feeling the chakra underneath it. He wouldn't be able to undo it without killing the boy -to be honest, he wasn't even certain it would come undone if he did. Mito might be able to safely break this, but unfortunately, she was a few decades late at this point (at least he assumed so; he'd heard rumours about Uzumaki being ridiculously long-lived unless they were killed in battle).

"Well, then", he drawled. "Let's see what you have got there, boy."

His Mangekyou rotated, forcing the darkness to bleed back and finally revealing a large body caged behind the metal gates.

The fox' red eyes were far too largely opened with shock, nearly bulging. "That cannot be", it growled, its voice aghast with both, fear and shock. "That chakra… that is…"

"Kurama!"

At this point, there was no telling who was more shocked upon the two of them facing each other. However; Madara was the first one re-gaining his wits and took a step forward. "What happened?!"

This seal… was made to last. There was no way even for the Kyuubi to force its way out; these barriers would contain *anything*. Well, with the possible exception of Hashirama. The jutsu being able to capture *his* ocean of chakra would be nigh impossible to create. Its power alone would rot any seals with time, even without him actively attempting to free himself.

"That cannot be!" The Bijuu nearly scrambled back within his tiny cage, obviously aghast upon facing him. "You- You cannot-"

"It is me", Madara attempted to soothe, stepping closer to the sealed gate. "What happened? Who dared to- who sealed you here?" And why… when? Who would be so cruel as to seal one living being into another?!

"You cannot be here", the fox snarled. "You are dead! Whoever uses this… avatar of yours, they didn't even get the chakra right!" Nowhere near boiling enough, overwhelmingly scalding and malicious, suffocating whoever stood in his way…

"It is me", Madara attempted again, refraining from taking another step forward as Kurama had retreated as far as possible within his little cage. "It's me", he repeated. "Indra! You said I was your-" The fox *howled* in something that wasn't even agony anymore, or wrath or fury, but far behind any of those. "Indra is gone", it screamed, its voice forcing the water around Madara's ankles to splash. "Gone, gone, gone! Do not dare using his name, Uchiha Madara! Not after what you have done to me, not after you used me!"

This time, it was Madara who took a step back. "What I have… done?", he asked, equally confused and pained. What *had* he done, to make Kurama, the one who always claimed to love him most, react this violently? For once, he felt at a loss of words and desperately

wished for Hashirama to be with him. The stupid Senju was far better suited for situations requiring emotional precision and empathy. “Kurama, I-”

“You cannot know that name!”

“Of course I do; you told me.” Madara was truly starting to get desperate at this point. His Sharingan begged to spring to life again but he bit back the urge as he for once didn’t want to appear threatening. “After Hashirama-”

“Leave!”

The Uchiha blinked. He couldn’t remember ever feeling this off-footed. “What-”

“I said *leave!*”

Another moment passed. Then, Madara’s figure started to fade as he retreated, unable to think of any solution other than forcing his way into the Bijuu’s memories to figure out what apparently had gone so very wrong. However; he would have Hashirama attempt to soothe Kurama first. Maybe he’d have better luck, he thought, as reality set in and he stepped back from the halfway unclothed boy.

As he started re-dressing, Madara couldn’t help the feeling of missing something very, very obvious.

“Tsunade.”

Hashirama’s voice was calm, but it was the kind of quiet that was bound to shatter into absolute wrath with a single word uttered wrongly. She couldn’t remember her gentle grandfather having ever used such a tone with her.

“Why is this child within the elite forces?”

The Fifth Hokage pressed her lips together. “I took on the mantle as Hokage not even a month ago”, she confessed. “I took over the entire squad-system Lord Third set up” -despite his anger, Hashirama couldn’t help but wonder what happened to number Four- “And only currently try to fully understand the recruiting-system.” To be honest, she hadn’t even done that. There had just been *so much* to do…

Without bothering to answer (which even Hashirama himself was aware was both, rude and uncharacteristic for him), the Shoudaime’s attention swapped back to the boy. “What’s your name?”, he asked, his voice for once carrying the authority his title as First Hokage granted him.

The boy didn’t answer, even though he seemed nervous but with the mask covering his face, Hashirama couldn’t be certain.

It was Tsunade, who came to his aid. “You may answer”, she told him, sensing that opposing her grandfather would only worsen the already tense situation.

The boy kept quiet for a moment longer. Then, his answer came short and precise.

“Sai.”

Hashirama nodded. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Sai-kun.” He forced the boiling anger down his throat, leaving it shimmering under the surface -another rarity for him. “How old are you?”, he decided to ask, instead of further concentrating on his anger.

Another moment passed, before the boy answered. “Twelve.” Those were the answers Danzo-sama had explicitly ordered him to give, if any situation demanded him to, until he would undoubtedly get another cover-name and another age to got with it… within the parameters of his physical appearance, of course.

The man watched him with strangely piercing eyes seeming to cut right through him. That gaze was… unsettling, he thought, even though he wasn’t certain about naming the emotion crawling within him correctly. Was he… afraid? No, that was not it. It was always hard, naming emotions he was not supposed to feel but this man made it particularly… difficult.

“Please remove your mask, Sai-kun.” It was more of an order than a request, as apparently, the strange man hidden underneath the henge they had not been supposed to break didn’t believe his answer. Strange, Sai mused, he had not given it hesitatingly or left any vocal insecurities about the age he had been told to be.

He didn’t move.

“Sai-kun.” This time, it was the Hokage talking. “Remove your mask.”

His muscles tensed despite his best efforts to stop them.

He was not allowed to take off his mask. Not even in the face of death, Danzo-sama had ordered… and his position within Root’s line of authority outranked the Hokage -especially this new one, that Danzo-sama claimed might be a threat to the village’s stability in the long run.

“Sai.” By now, her voice was cold and he was able to identify the creeping feeling as fear. Danzo-sama had not prepared him for this scenario. He had never been asked to un-mask, he not- “Remove. Your. Mask.”

He could not, would not, had been forbidden! His loyalty belonged to Danzo-sama and Root, his duty was to protect the village from within when nobody else- With a jerk, the Hokage got up from her chair. “Don’t you dare to-” “Who ordered you to keep it on?” The man’s voice had changed. The anger wasn’t gone but… overlaid with something else, something he wasn’t able to name, as he had rarely ever experienced it.

Who was this strange man and why was he so very interested?! There was absolutely no reason to; he had always been just another Anbu-member -even though a smaller one. Why did this man suddenly decide he wanted to see his face and reveal his identity -which would be useless since there was nobody in the village outside of Root able to recognise him?!

The man had already gotten up from his seat after having vocalising his anger about Sai being with the Anbu. Now, he came closer and for some reason Sai was unable to identify, he found himself taking a step back.

Weakness. Danzo-sama would severely punish him if he found out.

The motion changed the man's expression yet again. Stupid of him to be so very obvious with them, Sai would have deemed, hadn't he been so very unsettled himself by the man.

In front of him, the strange man went down to a knee, bringing them closer in hight. "It's alright." His voice had changed, Sai noticed. Gotten slightly deeper, and he realised the henge had camouflaged it, as well -at least until now. "You're fine", the man repeated, carefully putting one broad palm onto Sai's shoulder. "I just want to know who asked you to keep your mask on, even in front of the Hokage. I shouldn't put you into this position, but you should *not* be in this rank at your age. You are a child, your duty is not… *this*."

For the first time, Sai felt anger burning through him. He wasn't certain how he knew, but how dare this man questioning his loyalty to Danzo-sama? To Root! He was… he was...! "My duty will always be t-" His body spasmed, his anger fading into nothing and his tongue refused to move, glued to the bottom of his mouth, his lips pressed shut. His legs gave out under him as nothing but pure, blinding pain rolled over him. He had never dared to even consider breaking security, of telling anyone of Root, of his loyalty to Danzo-sama, protecting Konoha from within. And now, in a fit of anger, he almost had… this was why emotions needed to be non-existent! This is why they were a threat! His body spasmed again and he *deserved* it, deserved the blinding pain for nearly having broken the uttermost law of security.

And then it was gone.

His mouth opened and he gasped for air, but he couldn't focus. The pain was supposed to ebb away slowly, to allow him to get a grip again after nearly betraying Root, not… His eyes snapped open and he couldn't supress the sharp gasp escaping his lips.

The was chakra *everywhere*.

All around him, green chakra filled the room, and while the potted plant near the window grew at least half a meter with it, the windows burst open, not able to withstand the force, as the walls cracked with the burst of pressure.

Sai was no Sensor but even he knew that he should feel the wracking chakra around him, and yet everything was… still. As though the raging force stopped mere inches from his body, leaving him unharmed. His mask, though… his mask was gone.

"Please open your mouth for me."

Without even considering disobeying, he parted his lips and two fingers carefully pulled out his tongue, the black sealing marks all to obvious.

"If this is your work… Tsunade… you will answer to me for it."

Having stepped back at the utter wrath of chakra, the Fifth Hokage had not quite regained her wits. Next to the door, Shizune looked just a moment away from fainting, leaving both women unable to answer.

Carefully, Hashirama's fingertip rested onto the boy's tongue. The seal was skilfully crafted but nowhere close the perfectness Uzumaki-work was able to come up with. He wouldn't even have to properly undo it… not if he could just as well burst it into pieces by infusing enough chakra to overwhelm the layers in a short enough period of time.

Obviously, the seal hadn't been designed to withstand outside force -which implied its caster was certain the bearer would die before anyone getting close enough to un-do it and that certainly added another degree of fury bubbling in his gut- and after just a moment of careful working (he didn't want to burn the boy's tongue off or worse, the rest of his head), the markings cracked and with the tip of his fingers, Hashirama grated them into dust.

"Tsunade." His voice was eerily calm and if the situation had been different, Hashirama would have chuckled at how much he sounded like Madara right before he unleashed his burning temper on some poor fool daring to oppose him. "Were you aware of this?"

"No." The Godaime Hokage didn't think she would be able to answer anything other if her life depended on it.

"I am disappointed."

The words stung like nothing else she had heard in recent years, even more so considering her ever easy-going, caring grandfather was the one to say them and she couldn't supress a flinch. She was rather certain she did not want to face the consequences, had she been unable to truthfully deny her knowledge of whoever had sealed the Anbu's tongue.

"You will have to come with me, Sai-kun."

The Anbu blinked, never having faced any training even *beginning* to prepare him for situations as these. However; with his seal undone, he couldn't very well face Danzo-sama… but… Shin wouldn't know, he needed to inform him or he might… wonder…

"Tsunade." For the third time, the strange shinobi -undoubtedly powerful if he could simply erase Danzo-sama's seal like this- addressed the Hokage in his highly rude manner. "Please find out who did this… or I will do so myself."

Chapter End Notes

I really was struggling with the second half of this chapter. I'd been staring at it for weeks, uncertain about how to continue. To force myself out of depression, I read your comments again (you have no idea how often I do that and how happy I am about them each time).
Elenyafinwe was the one to guess "I think the masked child is Sai" and while originally,

he wasn't even supposed to be in this story, I decided: Well dang, guess it's Sai.
And then I finished the chapter in one sitting, 11pm to 2am.
Also, Madara had to be the one talking to Kurama, since he would've torn Konoha into shreds if it had been the other way round.

Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Basically, no one is having a nice day.

Chapter Notes

I am SO sorry this took so long.
I already started with the next chapter though and in that one, we'll finally get to a part im a CRAVING to write! Actually, they were supposed to happen in this chapter but I didn' want to rush things more than I already do. Also, feels like the potentially evil geniusses need to step up their game. After all, Hashirama and Madara didn't even try to figure out what happened.

“So… it’s us again.”

“Not like anyone else is up to it”, Kakuzu drawled and Izuna made a face. “I’m not sure I am up to anything, really”, he confessed, even realising himself such a confession was uncharacteristic for him.

“The Sensor-Units are still searching but I doubt they’ll be successful, if they haven’t by now”, Tobirama said. The only good thing about no news at all during the night was the fact it meant no report about their brothers’ deaths either. Whatever had happened on the battlefield, had led to… unpredictable results.

And well, if there were Shinobi able to predict the unpredictable within the village, it came down to the four of them. And if the situation hadn’t been so serious, it would be hilarious how for the very first time, they managed to sit at the table like the adults they were supposed to be. On actual chairs. All of them. Izuna wasn’t lounging on the table, Mito had actually neatly piled away her formula-sheets, Kakuzu’s feet weren’t on the tabletop and Tobirama wasn’t mentally bouncing between five ideas while trying the get some kind of order into the haywire that was supposed to be Konohagakure’s elite.

Carefully, Tobirama stapled his hands on the table. “Let us recap what we know”, he started, not even adding the “Other than our brothers being missing” he would have any under normal circumstances as to avoid having to deal with Izuna’s predicable attitude. Until a few days ago, he would have considered Izuna’s seriousness a blessing.

Mito shook her head. “As much as it pains me, we already went over this. I released the seal that was used to hide the containment of Matatabi’s chakra. The chakra-channels weren’t covered anymore.”

Tobirama nodded. He was the Sensor in their… had it any right to be called a team, and thus, the massive amounts of channelled chakra had been like a punch to the guts, even before her scream had echoed across the battle-field. It hadn’t lasted long, though. “Her chakra disappeared altogether just a few moments later”, he continued. “But it has to have been considerably drained. I know her ordinary chakra-reserves” Was it even correct labelling for a tailed beast, who basically existed out of nothing but compressed chakra? “And what I sensed on the battlefield was a mere fracture, before it disappeared altogether.” And just like Hashirama and Madara, they hadn’t found any trace of Matatabi, either.

Izuna merely shrugged. “I leaped as soon as I heard her”, he narrated, as he had already done at least thrice. “But something went wrong and it just… I don’t know, it *shattered*. I only remember pain, afterwards, until Inaroki pinched off my eyes.”

Kakuzu crossed his arms, his brows drawn tightly together. “I think we are asking the wrong questions”, he stated. “After all, *we* are still here. Shouldn’t we be more interested in figuring out what those who *aren’t* have been doing?”

“You mean except for the part where wo don’t have a fucking clue because Hashirama was off *somewhere*, keeping those weapons at bay?”, Izuna asked. “Because the last I heard of him, Aniki was having fun slaughtering enemy-lines.” And that had been witnessed by enough Konoha-nin to be considered reliable… well, on top of Izuna’s own knowledge of his older brother’s fondness of battle. As soon as the Voice of Doom had stopped calling for random shinobi, he had immediately- wait. “Why did it stop calling random villagers?”, he asked and Tobirama frowned. “Because it was useless”, he answered the obvious. “Your brother was able to bring them back, anyway.”

From what he could tell due to their shinobi’s reports, Madara’s Mangekyou-ability had seemed to be involved. Unfortunately, not even Izuna knew what it entailed exactly, since Madara had never used it in front of him after their father’s failed attempt at blackmail and neither had he spoken of it, after the Uchiha brothers’ agreement not to use it in battle, back in the war-era. (Had it truly not even been two years? It felt a lifetime ago, when they had slaughtered each other on the battlefield…) “I talked to a few Nara and Sarutobi after the battle”, Tobirama said. “And from what they saw, Madara’s Mangekyou ability involves some kind of space-time influence.” Unfortunately, those who had been brought back couldn’t remember anything other than having been standing on the very same spot they had been first dis- and then re-appeared. But that had indeed made the assumption of time-manipulation even more likely.

“That wretched Voice didn’t call for anyone but Hashirama, at the end”, Mito noted. “But he didn’t answer, and as far as we know, that is mandatory for whatever they used to work.”

Tobirama’s fingers tapped on the table in an unusual display of tenseness. “We can’t know”, he cautioned, frown deeply etched into his face. “Before Matatabi’s chakra disappeared, her scream drowned out everything else on the battlefield; we wouldn’t have heard Hashirama.”

“Yes, but that wasn’t longer than five seconds at most”, Kakuzu answered, even though his forehead was split with a frown, as well. “But if it comes down to it… it might have been enough.” Every shinobi knew after all, how much could happen in a single second -or even less than that.

Izuna pressed his lips together. “I leaped immediately, as soon as I recognised her. I aimed for forty-three seconds, but I don’t think I made it past ten… fifteen, at most.” But the time-window fitted, a fact all four of them noted. If Hashirama had indeed answered the Voice of Doom upon hearing Matatabi’s voice -which would be anything but an unlikely scenario, knowing their Kage-, Madara would have noticed his absence immediately, and would have attempted to draw him back from wherever he had returned all the other Konoha-nin who had answered the Voice before with his Mangekyou Sharingan

For a few minutes, the room was eerily silent -more so than it ever had been since they started their meetings months ago.

Then, Mito was the first one to speak up. “Just that we’re all on the same page: We agree with the assumption that whatever Madara did when he tried to get Hashirama back clashed somehow with Izuna’s time-leap.”

Izuna sighed and for the first time, he sounded weary. “Let’s just blame Hashirama. I bet this is his fault, somehow.”

Describing Madara’s mood upon leaving the Uzumaki’s (because he had to be one, there was no way misjudging that chakra of his, even though it had been mixed up somewhere) apartment as poor would be the same as naming his Fire Annihilation a campfire.

He was angry at whoever had caused this… situation, for a lack of a better word, saddened by Kurama’s rejection (and wasn’t that all kinds of hilarious; he was sad due to the fact a Bijuu didn’t like him), upset, dejected, and fucking hell he even missed Hashirama right now because *he* would have known what to do.

To shorten things, the only thing he certainly *wasn’t* right now was happy.

He made sure to avoid the village’s part that contained the Uchiha-compound (or rather, where it had been in his Konoha, that wasn’t this wretched version of itself) as he slowly made his way back to their apartment.

What had gone wrong? Or rather, what would go wrong, when they were back in *their* Konoha, where they belonged, to the Konoha that was as it belonged?

What had happened to Matatabi in this utterly wrong version of reality? To Gyūki and the others? He wasn’t sure his sanity would thank him, if he attempted to find out. He could already feel something clawing at it, something that hadn’t been there before, and it didn’t feel as though it was his own- with a shake of his head that had his mane of hair (still hidden underneath a gen-jutsu) flying, he shook it off. He had bigger problems to worry about.

“Matsuda-san.”

They had to be shitting him. Out of all times, they couldn’t have chosen a worse one to try his patience. “I am on my way back to the apartment.” It wasn’t their fault, at least that was what he told himself -and also the sole thing keeping him from cleaving off their heads. There were only three shinobi this time, but he recognised them as the ones who had attempted to shadow him. “Fuck off.”

“We have orders-” “I’m sure you do. And now you have new ones because if you don’t get lost right now, I will *make you*.”

Unfortunately for them, they didn’t seem to realise that tearing at his patience any further was nothing but invited murder. Fortunately though, Hashirama’s influence upon him was greater than expected (and wasn’t that something to chew on) and thus, they dropped to the ground not dead but unconscious, after meeting the most flickering glimpse of Sharingan. What had they even been thinking upon not preventing eye-contact? Even if they didn’t know his true name, they should have- and then he realised that no, they might not know. Because his clan was gone, the Uchiha were no longer and maybe these people had never met them, never been trained on how to evade the Sharingan’s gen-jutsu because there was no longer any *need* to.

And now he was both, equally furious and depressed. Great. Could there be a better composition to cause his clan’s infamous spurts of madness?

Ignoring the downed shinobi, he continued his way back to their apartment, finally getting back to one of the main-streets and he sighed, as the laughter of two boys chasing each other fended off at least some of his anger. Children playing was better than children dying on battlefields, no matter what, he deemed, as he entered their apartment. Noon wasn’t too far away and even though Hashirama didn’t right out *need* food, the genetical weirdo, he still got hungry. Maybe he should get some lunch while he waited, it wouldn’t be too long probably, until Hashirama returned and they could share news and consider their further course of action.

Also, he really needed to bully Hashirama into calming Kurama somehow, as they needed to figure out what had happened to have the Bijuu sealed into a child. Even thinking about it made his anger-levels rise unhealthily again. To keep his chakra in check, he took a deep breath and thought about the afternoon last month, when Hashirama had decided they needed some time off and dragged him to a glade, little flowers rising around their feet his arms wrapped around Madara, swinging slowly to some kind of music only Hashirama had apparently been able to hear.

Then he had ruined the mood by telling Madara how all that stress in the tower had caused him to lose weight he absolutely couldn’t spare in his condition and the daisies had drooped their leaves in sadness as their Master had gotten his sorry ass kicked.

The bright beacon of Hashirama’s chakra making its way into his direction snapped him out of the memory and even more important, the realisation that it wasn’t alone. Madara re-applied the gen-jutsu he had dropped after entering the apartment as the door opened, two sets of foot-steps entering. “I am home”, Hashirama greeted and Madara could basically feel

the tension vibrating off of him. He also recognised the accompanying chakra as one of those who had stayed behind to guard Hashirama when he had left the apartment this morning.

Of course, the stupid Senju had outed himself but was bringing one of those wannabe spies into their place really necessary?

He didn't say any of that, though, since Hashirama's mood was apparently only slightly less irritated than his own and even though his lover could be the world's most mighty idiot, he probably did have a reason to take whoever it was into this shitty excuse of privacy.

"Welcome back", Madara answered from the kitchen, because despite it all his mother indeed had taught him manners somewhere between training and battles. Not for the first time he wondered what she would have thought about the peace they had struck with the Senju, that was now slowly but surely expanding to most of the main clans in Fire-Country.

Hashirama made his way to the kitchen as well, followed by a… boy. Madara lifted one of his eyebrows. "Is there a reason you brought the child here?", he asked and even though his question had been sarcastic -not even Hashirama would just pick up a random child from the streets in their current situation- the Shoudaime's pause was too long to indicate anything but bad news.

"This is Sai-kun", he finally answered. "He is one of the Anbu."

Madara couldn't even ask whether he was certain, as he previously had recognised the boy's chakra as one of those that had stayed behind to watch Hashirama after he had drawn his part of the squad out to get rid of them. The pieces just hadn't clicked together, especially as in their version of Konoha, the Anbu were only an idea of Tobirama, to form a squad of elite-shinobi for missions of uttermost danger and security.

The plan did never make it to anything more than the idea as it was obvious Madara would be the one to just take over if anything like that would ever happen to be an issue. Or perhaps, Tobirama himself. Izuna just wasn't one for secrecy, he would far too prone about just antagonising the ever-lasting shit out of whomever he would be assigned to and conveniently forget the secret-part.

To be fair, Madara couldn't pretend he didn't share that tendency.

"In that case, I hope Tsunade happens to have a very convincing reasoning to assign a ten-year-old", the Uchiha noted, carefully keeping his own opinion in check -at least for the time being.

"I am twelve", the boy corrected and Madara frowned. He was small, for his age then. To be fair, Madara himself had been a rather small child, too. Hashirama suspected it had to do with his illness, but even if it did, the shortage of food was just as good a reason, Madara thought.

Maybe with only one of those unfortunate circumstances and not right out two, Hashirama by now wouldn't be nearly a full head taller than him.

“Being ten or twelve doesn’t make any difference”, Madara deemed. “You are a child, your place is at the training grounds, not the Anbu. Did Tsunade assign you?”

This time, it was Hashirama who answered. “No”, he denied. “Apparently, she has been away from the village for years and returned not even a month ago, taking over as Hokage right after.” Madara couldn’t help but frown. The Hokage was supposed to be the one most rooted (pun about Hashirama’s Mokuton not intended) in the village, why would that title and responsibility be given to somebody after being away for so long? Had the village run out of options with no Uchiha left and therefore decided Hashirama’s descendant would be the best choice despite the circumstances?

“Well”, he asked again. “Who assigned him, then?”

Sai pressed his lips together and stared at some point left of Madara’s ear. A common tactic to pretend eye-contact. Hashirama sighed. “He refuses to tell us anything even after I destroyed the seal and-” He cut himself off, but it was too late already. He could feel Madara’s chakra starting to coil underneath his skin, the familiarity making it easy to do so, even though he was no Sensor.

He remembered Madara’s reaction during the Hyuuga-meeting and his lover’s utter disdain upon their sealing practise. What had been done to this boy was not any better and not even Hashirama would excuse it, benevolent as he was. At that alone, a line had been crossed and his guts told him this time wouldn’t be the last.

Hashirama indeed had ways to get people to talk, no matter how stubborn. But he would never use those on a child. This was probably, why he had brought the child along. Madara had his way making people talk the same way Hashirama did… but he also had much more subtle options to get information, as the Uzumaki boy already had gotten to learn -or rather hadn’t, since he wouldn’t remember a thing.

Sai didn’t even notice the red irises meeting his own, as they had moved far too fast for him to anticipate, meeting his gaze from where it had been glued above Madara’s shoulder. His head drooped slightly.

“Whatever happened, I don’t think…” Hashirama didn’t even know! He knew deep, deep down that something was going terribly wrong in so many more ways than they could even see right now, but he couldn’t even put it into words. It felt as though below the surface of laughing children and merry people on the streets, the village smelled of rot. Like an apple shiny and red on the outside but filled with worms and decay. And it was only a matter of time before any of them started breaking the surface, if they hadn’t already.

A cool palm on his cheek brought him back to the present and he was met by Madara’s Sharingan. The Uchiha was worried for him and Hashirama forced himself to smile. “Just put me up to date after, so we can find a solution.”

Madara nodded curtly, before his Sharingan rotated and Hashirama forcibly relaxed his tense muscles. He didn’t know how deep Madara would have to dig around in the boy’s memories, but even if he didn’t like having the boy’s brain served on a silver platter, it was the least harmful way for him -at least as long as Madara didn’t intend for it to be otherwise.

Hashirama grabbed a bottle of water, conveniently forgetting a glass and just drinking right out of it since Madara was occupied otherwise and waited, since there was little he could do. It shouldn't take too long, all they needed was a name and maybe some background information.

He didn't expect Madara to still be at it, once he had finished his water.

He neither expected Madara to grit his teeth hard enough he feared they might crack.

Or Madara's chakra to start seeping off of him in waves, causing the walls to split.

And above all, he didn't expect Madara to just leave through the front door with Sai still standing in the kitchen in a daze right after.

But after all they had seen so far, Hashirama really wasn't certain why any of this still came at a surprise. He really should have known better.

Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

Madara's pissed.
Hashirama's pissed because Madara's pissed.
Everyone else is pissing their pants.

Chapter Notes

I was rooting (huehuehue) for this chapter and at the same time, I was terrible afraid to fuck it up or only manage to write two paragraphs and be done with it, or or or... But well, after I kicked my ass and wrote this within two days, I think it turned out pretty Okay.

Btw I recently noticed PitchBlackMagpie apparently decided to delete their profile and works... I'm really sad about it, I think everyone who reads this is familiar with at least Paligensis -that work was what got me into writing this fic, after all.
And now that we're at it, I just want you to know that when I started writing Breathless, I decided to not moderate comments. I decided that if people get too disrespectfull, I would do so later on. And guess what? During all the time I've been writing this, all these years and chapters, only one single person wrote they did't like my work. One. And even that hasn't been in an insulting manner.
So what I want to say is I absolutely expected to have to moderate comments sooner rather than later. But until today, I don't. So thank you, every single one of you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hashirama sighed as he infused some medical chakra into Sai’s forehead, before gently casting a Release to snap him out of the remains of Madara’s gen-jutsu. The boy blinked at him. “What…?”

“It’s alright now”, Hashirama soothed. “Matsuda just needed to figure out who was responsible for this situation, but he took care not to leave any lasting damage.” Then, he frowned. “Even though he was… unhappy with the results.”

“What happened?”, the boy repeated and Hashirama sighed. “You shouldn’t be assigned to the Anbu in your age, Sai-kun. You are far too young… but since you refused to tell either me or Tsunade anything, Mada-tsuda, Matsuda used a gen-jutsu to watch some of your memories. He left without telling me, though, and-” That was the moment, the door was

opened (and not gently, mind you) and a handful of shinobi entered. Hashirama didn't know any of them, but with their masks it would probably be hard to tell even if he had.

"Where is Matsuda-san?", one of them demanded instead of greeting and Hashirama frowned. "I cannot remember any of you asking to enter", he answered politely, but one of them stepped forth nevertheless. "We have been ordered to stay with Matsuda-san, but despite knowing our orders he omitted them. His chakra surged and we made our way here as quickly as possible, after breaking the gen-jutsu he cast upon us! He has been ordered to-" "Ah." A little sheepishly, Hashirama rubbed his neck. "Matsuda doesn't work too well with orders. You might want a different approach if you want his cooperation." The only time Hashirama had ordered him had been when Madara had right out refused -again- his rightful position as the Hokage's advisor. And even that order had been rather hypothetical. Ordering Madara would either achieve having the Uchiha do the exact opposite just for spite, or getting right out killed, depending on the situation. And to think Madara called *him* childish…

"If he resists even further, we will have no other choice but force his-"

"I would heavily advise against it, since if you so much as try to touch him, the forcing one will be *me*." And just like that, Hashirama's lips thinned into a small line, his chakra curling underneath the surface as he willed snarling branches to stay beneath the ground. Involuntarily, every single one of the masked shinobi took a step backwards, before they forced themselves to stop, standing their ground.

It took a few moments before the silence broke, as one of them (Hashirama couldn't even say if his mask was supposed to be a bear or an ugly dog) awkwardly cleared his throat. "Nevertheless, Tsunade-hime needs to be informed."

Hashirama sighed. If Madara would only have told him what had riled him up so much… but his lover had always been on the hot-headed side. He had considered following him, but if Madara wanted him to, he would have said so. Further annoying the Uchiha would only worsen the situation for each of them. "It would be better if you do", he finally answered, upon realising the Anbu hesitated for whatever reason. Finally, the woman (he was rather certain it was one, at least) slipped out of the still open door and Hashirama turned around, making his way to the kitchen. "Is anyone else interested in a pot of tea?", he asked. He would have preferred dinner but somehow felt as though that wasn't an actual option anymore.

When Tsunade entered the apartment merely a few short minutes later, all the Anbu had a cup of green tea waiting for them on the table, even though none of them touched it, as drinking would mean removing their masks. Hashirama wisely refrained from explaining that Madara would be able to simply identify their chakra-signatures and Hashirama himself just… knew. He might be no Sensor but when it came to people, his guts had yet to fail him once he met them.

"Where is Matsuda-san?"

Hashirama poured another cup, offering it to either Tsunade, the black-haired assistant he had already met in her office, or the last Anbu.

“I don’t know”, he answered. “He was rather upset, and knowing him, it could go two ways.” With a rather big chance for the violent one. “Please drink your tea, Sai”, he then said, turning a little towards the boy. “You are slightly dehydrated.”

“Grand-” Tsunade stopped. “Granted”, she then started again. “That I trust you…” And she did, there were few people kinder than her grandfather, “But I cannot allow Matsuda-san to just roam around the village as he pleases.”

Hashirama smiled, maybe slightly wry, even though kind nevertheless. “There is little you can do about it, Tsunade.”

Two of the Anbu took a step forward, as he dared calling their current Hokage by her given name that easily. However; her narrowed gaze met his open one. “You can, though.”

“I probably could”, he confirmed, feeling rather confident that if it came down to it, he would be able to soothe Madara enough to keep him from outlashing. But since it depended on both, context *and* his lover’s current mood, he couldn’t be certain. Before she could ask further, he set down his now empty cup (the tea hadn’t even been good, probably too old since the weirdly wrapped package had already been in the kitchen alongside a whole bunch of stuff he had no idea what they were for). “Matsuda has a certain… aversion against any kind of orders, even mine.” *Especially* his, probably. “And he was rather upset about whatever he has witnessed within Sai-kun’s memories. But since he is merely investigating, there is nothing to worry ab-” In the not too far distance, an ocean of burning hot chakra soared to life, overwhelmingly scalding, and of the two sensors within the Anbu-team, one went to her knees, clutching her head. Within nothing but a moment, Hashirama was on his feet, a chakra-covered palm on her forehead to soothe the overburden.

“Me and my big mouth”, he sighed. However; as a second wave of chakra rolled across the village, his resignation evolved into worry.

“So much… cakra”, the second of the Anbu sensors whispered, as Hashirama made his way to the entrance to slip back into his shoes.

When this time, an actual shockwave rolled across the village, though, he decided to forgo footwear for today and left the door barefooted, quickly assessing which direction Madara’s chakra-eruption had hailed from. It took him a moment to notice Tsunade was at his side, alongside the Anbu -except the one who had been overwhelmed by Madara’s chakra outburst. It was probably better, if she stayed behind, knowing the Uchiha’s temper wasn’t prone to calm easily.

Too quick to even leave behind even a speck of dust, Hashirama bolted off, his sudden stops in between the leaps being the only reason the others were still be able to keep up with him despite his speed.

And then, the ground shook again and Hashirama stopped once more, sharply correcting his path until he made it to the nearest plaza. Not a large one, but with a pretty fountain in the

middle, probably to entertain the children. Not that it mattered, though, since only moments later an explosive impact utterly destroyed the structure, the water soaking the man now struggling to get out of the small crater, obviously having been kicked in by- “Madara!”

Behind him, the Anbu flinched back and only Tsunade managed to stand her ground as her grandfather named the village’s earliest, most powerful nuke-nin. But why? What was he trying to accomplish with- “Don’t you dare stopping me!”, the blond man snarled. His chakra was of the deepest blue and despite its colour unbelievably burning and scalding, enough to instantly gasify the water that had gathered at his feet. Next to him, a black-haired man wrapped in bandages struggled to get on his feet. His hand moved to the bandages around his right arm but before he was able to reach them, another kick -faster than every shinobi except Hashirama was able to even so much as see- pounded him even further into the ground.

“Danzō -sama!”

Hashirama didn’t know which of the Anbu behind him had called out- or maybe it was one of the few shinobi who had already gathered on the plaza, as well- but finally, he stepped forth. “Why don’t you tell me what exactly happened?”, he asked, making sure to keep his voice even. With Madara’s temper having snapped, his own needed to be in check for his lover’s, as well.

In a poor excuse of an answer, Madara bared his teeth -even though not at him, so that was at least something. Instead, his gaze lowered to the man at his feet. “Yes… Why don’t you tell him what you did… *eye-thief*.” Hashirama felt his eyes widen at the accusation. Eye-stealing had been gruesome even during the war, but after it, as the village had been raised and their people finally mingled, the Senju had realised the full extend of what was considered the greatest possible crime for the Uchiha.

“I advise you to leave Danzō-dono alone immediately.” This time, it was Tsunade who had spoken up and for the first time, Hashirama felt actually irritated with her. If -and only if- Madara’s claim was true, it was not in her rights to hinder him.

However; to Hashirama’s ever-rising concern, Madara did indeed step back from the man… but only to pace at her, his whole body nearly trembling with barely-suppressed fury. “And who are you”, he snarled, “To *dare* trying to stop me? I will-” “How about you explain what exactly you found out and after, we will work it out. Together, like we always do.”

The upside of Hashirama’s suggestion: Madara turned to him. The downside: His gaze didn’t lose an ounce of rage. “You have no idea”, the Uchiha growled. “If not even I could see it all because I couldn’t *bear* it, you will be the-” He stopped mid-sentence, a trickle of blood falling from his lips as out of seemingly nothing but thin air, a katana pierced his stomach. The bandaged man -Danzō- had moved nearly instantly, having used the advantage of both of them being distracted with each other.

Hashirama looked up, fury starting bubble in his chest but he held back, as in front of him, a pair of beautiful Mangekyou bloomed to life, rotating counter-clockwise exactly once.

Underneath Madara’s feet, the world seemed to shift, the blooming blood on his clothes fading into nothing as his body seemed to move backwards despite standing absolutely still.

And when the katana stroke again for the first time, he moved fast enough to flicker, evading the stroke with what seemed nearly casual grace… and while he did, his features seemed to flow, as his hair darkened, long curls unfurling, his skin becoming the fair shade of ivory Hashirama was used to caress every night by now and despite becoming slightly smaller than his gen-jutsu had been, he didn't appear to shrink.

Hashirama sighed. "So, I can finally stop calling you that ridiculous name?"

"You didn't manage half the time anyway, shithead", the Uchiha spat and Hashirama turned to the bandaged man again. "How about we-" He frowned. The bandage around the man's right eye was gone, revealing a Sharingan… and one he certainly had not been birthed with. The eye started to spin as it stared into Hashirama's and the Shoudaime's lips thinned.

"Stop this."

For once, his order didn't leave any room for arguments. Whatever this man attempted, it wouldn't work on him, anyway. The only one ever able to actually endanger him with his Sharingan was Madara. Then, he finally realised something, taking a step forth. "That is… my chakra", he whispered and Madara barked out a single laugh. "No, you dolt. This is a weak shadow of what your chakra *might* be capable of." Then, his blood red yes pierced Root's leader once more as his teeth bared again, strangely uncanny to a cat showing his fangs. "Maybe I will take care of your clan once I am back home… You cannot be born if there is no clan, after all. Am I right, Shimura?"

"Uchiha… Madara", the man spat, sounding shellshocked, alarmed, unbelieving, excited, all at once and for some reason, it only managed to piss the Uchiha off even further.

Somewhere behind them, somebody screamed.

"I will kill you." It was a statement, a simple observation, not even a threat. "And believe me when I say I will do so a dozen times over and enjoy every single moment." He didn't quite finish the sentence, before Danzō leaped forward with uncanny speed and Madara dodged his outstretched hand, fingers coated with some liquid and clearly aiming for his face -aiming for his eyes. However; it wasn't the Shimura's fingers closing around their target. Neither were it Madara's.

Instead, it was Hashirama's arm Danzō clawed at, fingers wrapped around the man's throat. "I am a very patient man", the Senju deemed calmly, easily hardening his flesh with wooden cells to keep the man in his grip at bay, "But I fear I will be at its end soon enough, if there is no explanation for all of this."

The Shimura's sole natural eye widened. "H… Hah…" Without preamble, Hashirama's fingers released their deadly grip and Danzō managed to meet the ground standing up, even though barely. "Shoudaime…sama."

"Ah." Like a tiger closing on his prey, Madara circled closer. "So you *do* recognise him, even with the henge. Not a formidable feat, mind you, it does nothing to hide what's underneath the surface, after all." And then, so fast he disappeared, Madara closed in, fingers closing in

on the Shimura's face with perfect precision before retreating fast enough it nearly seemed as though he hadn't moved at all.

A single red eye-ball rested in his hand, the visual nerve still attached and for a moment, Madara's face was a picture of grief. "I can still feel him", he whispered, his voice sounding unfamiliarly… hoarse. "The pain… and the betrayal." The Uchiha spat out, right in front of Danzō's feet, his expression one of uttermost hatred.

Hashirama swallowed. "You… can tell?", he asked and Madara's lips thinned into a white line. "There is a reason, eye theft is worse than murder", he answered and then, his face became gentle, as he looked down at the blood-red Sharingan once more. Within the palm of his hand, black flames manifested, closing in on the eye-ball. "You may leave now, cousin", the Uchiha leader murmured and as the Amaterasu burned away the stolen flesh, Madara left it flickering for a few moments longer as though he wanted to be absolutely certain, not a single trace remained.

"Traitor!" It was Danzō's voice breaking the heavy silence and he started at the Uchiha-leader, the right side of his face covered in blood. "The village needed this eye!"

"And what use", Hashirama cut in, to spare Madara the grief, "Would a village raised for love and equality have for a stolen eye?"

Danzō pulled the bandage above his now empty eye-socket, soaking up the blood. "You will not understand, Shoudaime-sama", he answered coolly. "The Senju have always been a clan of love, they know nothing of these burdens."

Behind him, Madara stiffed, but once more it was Hashirama who answered and finally, the useless henge fell off of him, revealing the red armour glinting in the sun (a storm would much rather fit the mood) and a slight breeze allowed his umber hair to swing gently behind his back. "The Senju have never been a clan of love, but one of battle", he answered. "The clan of love have always been the Uchiha." He had corrected Danzō without even thinking about it, but once he said it, he couldn't help but realise how absolutely right he was. *Everything* about the Uchiha was about emotions. The Sharingan required ones so strong that Hashirama was one of the very few outsiders -maybe even the only one- who could even begin to understand because he had witnessed it. The Mangekyou Sharingan required depths of emotion they didn't even fully understand at this point, with only two having been awakened. Whatever the Uchiha did, their biggest goal had always been protection and their visual prowess was nothing but a manifestation of that desire.

The Uchiha were a clan of love. The Senju were merely one of war.

"You have always been too soft, Shoudaime", Danzō said and despite it all, Hashirama couldn't help but smile. "All I ever wanted was to protect my brother and be with the boy I fell in love with when I was a scrawny child", he answered with a softness so very much unfitting for the situation even Madara couldn't supress a smile. "You are one mushy bastard", he muttered quietly.

The Shimura's bandaged right arm twitched and immediately, Hashirama's focus was back on him. "That is my chakra", he said. "And my cells. I cannot remember giving you permission

to use either." Underneath the large sealed metal-gauntlet, Danzō's arm started to shiver and he grasped it with his left one, grit teeth, as he attempted to force the Shoudaime's overflowing life-force back into their structured paths.

"There is no seal able to hold me, Shimura-san."

Just as Madara's declaration to kill him, Hashirama's words weren't a threat, either. They were merely an observation of the undeniable and it was the mockery of a bad joke, as green, lush roots curled from underneath the bandages, starting to wrap around the metal container of the one who was considered Root's leader. Teared into pieces, the ripped bandages fell to the ground, as the metal cage around them crumpled, the seal giving in as it landed on the ground as well with a metallic impact echoing strangely in the sudden silence.

It was Madara, who finally broke it.

"I will kill you twice… for every single stolen eye."

Chapter End Notes

Is anyone even surprised?

Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

Certain people die more than once.

Chapter Notes

It's been nearly two months... because in the meantime, my notebook crashed, spitting sparks in my face.
Long story short, I now have a new one... and well, a few days later we had the rain from hell and parts of Germany got flooded. I actually was supposed to be in hospital for an operation on my foot but I was unable to even leave my village because the main streets were flooted! 10/10 could've used a Tobirama to deal with those masses of water.
On a serious note, though: When the water started to rise inside (from the drains), I ran into the basement to save whatever could be saved... and I still did so when the water started to rise OUTSIDE, as well, coming from a nearby (previously little) steam. It rose high enough to run more than halfway across the windows! I didn't realise at the time, but if those would've broken, I'd be dead body #173 by now.
Whatever you do during a flood: Never, EVER go to the basement!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You have to stop him.”

Hashirama turned calmly, his umber eyes meeting his grand-daughter’s. Even though apparently not having inherited his tanned skin-tone, her face shouldn’t be quite as pale. Her glossed lips seemed too prominent, that way. “And why”- a scream interrupted him and he waited until with a near-silent whisp, the man’s vocal chords had been neatly cut, before continuing. “Should I do so?”, he then asked. As to not have things escalating any further - which sounded ridiculous even to his own ears- a barrier of branches surrounded the plaza, sealing anyone else from entering the area. What they didn’t do was sealing anyone wishing to leave inside, but so far two people -both men- had fainted, the few children had been put under gen-jutsu as to spare them the sight, and the rest of six remaining people preferred to hide behind his grand-daughter.

Tsunade’s assistant, Shazane -or was it Shuzune?- had arrived just before he had closed off the place, currently standing behind his grand-daughter, her dark eyes far too wide as she stared at the scene unfolding behind him. Thankfully, at least young Sai had stayed behind in the apartment, since he had been too dazed to follow them after Madara’s prying gen-jutsu.

As had the Anbu getting overwhelmed with Madara's surge of chakra, so that made at least two people less to worry about.

"It is your duty to protect the village! It is *every* Kage's ultimate duty to do so!"

Hashirama's attention switched back to his grand-daughter as with a flick of his wrist, he caught an Anbu's ankle, slamming the man back into the wooden wall with just enough force not to break bones, as she attempted to make her way past the Shoudaime by some sort of flickering movement-jutsu. "Please do not interfere", Hashirama asked for the fifth time (the first attempt had been trying to merely run around him, the second had been three Anbu at once merely running around him at the same time, the third had been one attempting to merely run around him while two more engaged him in battle, and he had already forgotten what exactly the fourth had been, except it for once hadn't included running and hadn't that been a surprise).

"Has it already been forgotten", Hashirama then asked quietly, "That the Uchiha are part of Konoha, too?"

Behind him, the far too familiar sound of severed flesh told him the Shimura had fallen once more. Three minutes, seventeen seconds, Hashirama noted. Madara took great care the time-spans varied, this far counting a minimum of twenty-four seconds that had the Uchiha merely gutting him without preamble up to a current maximum span of four minutes and seven seconds after starting all over again. He didn't know whether varying time-spans were actually important to the Mangekyou-cast or Madara merely wanted to be unpredictable. Or maybe, it was simply his temper taking over from time to time, Hashirama thought wryly. That wouldn't surprise him, either.

At the start of it all, as soon as his inferiority in fight became obvious, the Shimura had done… well something; Hashirama was no Uchiha so he was unable to pin down what exactly had occurred. But since it had managed to piss Madara off even more -and hadn't it come in as a surprise that was even possible at this point- it undoubtly was related to the Sharingan he had implanted into his arm. His figure seemed to… shift, as the eye near his elbow slowly slipped shut… only to snap open a mere moment later, as Madara's own Mangekyou rotated counter-clockwise slightly faster than usual, not just once but thrice. "I will not allow you to use these stolen eyes, thief", Madara had seethed, even more venomous than before. Hashirama was by no means an expert when it came to the Mangekyou-Sharingan (because being an expert at fighting something was a far throw from being one at understanding) but whenever the Shimura attempted to use those implanted eyes of his, Madara would merely… overwrite whatever they did.

Unlike Madara, the Shoudaime was unaware that the explanation was both, ridiculously easy and complicated at the same time. The Izanagi was able to overwrite reality to the caster's desires and there were more reasons than Madara had fingers (and toes) to count why its use had been forbidden even during the war. However; the Shimura was no Uchiha. These eyes weren't his; their essence was fighting against their imprisonment, merely kept in check by Hashirama's cells after Madara had told the Senju to stop interfering with them as this revenge was a deeply personal one. Cursed eyes taken from dead bodies. And no matter how reality was re-formed, it still was bound to time. His own eyes would always be superior.

And thus, every single Izanagi was negated by merely forcing the eye casting it back in time to the moment right before it was initiated, ultimately un-doing the jutsu in the most literal meaning.

He would wait for the man's twenty-second final death, Madara had decided. Then, he would collect the stolen eyes, cherish them, their owners, the sacrifices made to obtain them, and burn them when the sun rose the next morning, as Amaterasu would take their souls to one last journey until lowering with them to the Pure Lands, when she faded for the night.

Nearly absently, he noticed the katana skewering the Shimura's right upper arm; his blade nailed the limb to the ground, his tantō immobilising the left one, both weapons being kept in place by chakra-infusion. Apparently, he had kicked the man to the ground without even noticing in his rage.

"Hashirama."

Still guarding the Uchiha's back against his own grand-daughter (and a bunch of other people), the Senju turned his head slightly, facing him. "What is it?"

Madara felt his right eye twitch, as he once again forced an Izanagi back in time, the halfway closed eye springing open once more. As much as he sometimes enjoyed the sweet taste of pain, his eyes were a different story and slowly but surely, even he felt the strain of overuse. "Keep your cells in check."

The Shoudaime sighed under his breath. "Finally", he then muttered. "Do you have any idea how weird this is?"

"At least it's not your eyes", the Uchiha leader answered coolly- though not entirely aimed at him; at least Hashirama hoped so.

"No, but it's the entire rest of my *face*", he protested and despite himself, Madara snorted. "Don't worry", the Uchiha soothed. "You're still far more ugly in real life."

"Madara!"

With a flick of his wrist, a kunai buried itself into the Shimura's lung, making him gasp blood as he writhed against the weapons nailing him to the ground. He just needed to cast the Izanagi to get out, he would find a way to escape, he needed to protect- "I don't approve."

And just like that, the life-force within his arms drew back, refusing to nurture the Sharingan embedded in his flesh, having them close halfway upon merely the Shoudaime's words. "Traitor", Danzō grit out between the gush of blood drippling from his chin.

Blood-red eyes burning with rage and yet cold, Madara watched the Shimura struggling on the ground. "This will be death fourteen… prepare for fifteen."

Danzō bared his teeth, stained red with fresh blood. "It does not matter how many times you kill me", he then gasped. "Konoha will thrive… because when it mattered, the Shoudaime put the village first and took you down!"

It took a moment for the shoe to drop and unsurprisingly, Hashirama's took just a tad longer than Madara's.

"Hashirama-" "I will tear it down." The Shoudaime's voice was barely more than a whisper. "I will raise this village to the ground, until *nothing* is left but ashes."

Somewhere behind them, somebody whimpered.

"Hashirama, don't be a moron, this is-" "If there is no village… There will be no death." The wooden wall around them wavered, the vines and branches shifting into the visage of a snarling dragon, its claws tearing up the streets they dug into. Somewhere out of view, something large collapsed and a little too roughly, the Senju's large palms clasped his face.

"No matter what, I will-" "You will retreat that wooden dragon, you over-protective ninny", Madara bellowed, taking a step back and scowling at the God of Shinobi, whose teeth were grit in fury, his chakra cracking the ground beneath their feet, snarling branches breaking free and causing havoc. "And then you'll use that brain of yours for five seconds!"

Behind them, Shizune took a step sideways, until she was nearly pressed into Tsunade's side as the Anbu drew closer as well, gathering protectively around their Kage. By now, everyone within the village was bound to notice the extend of… whatever was happening and Madara's lips thinned. Without turning around, the Uchiha's head jerked at the gathered Anbu. "One of you, get useful and calm the people out there", he ordered and when there wasn't immediate reaction, he barked: "Get moving or I'll do it myself!"

Despite that threat, the Shoudaime's hands twitched in the effort it took to now reach out again. Nevertheless, his wooden dragon allowed two Anbu to pass upon Tsunade's tense nod (because her options were currently indeed limited), merely snarling somewhat at one of them when he went a little too close past its head. At least Hashirama had toned the size down, or else it would have crushed a significant number of houses -and in addition, their residents. Unlike his lover right now, Madara was very much aware Hashirama would indeed regret harming the village, when he had calmed again. Especially once he realised the mind-leap Madara had already made -which was only a matter of time because despite common knowledge, Hashirama wasn't *dumb*.

"It doesn't matter right now, anyway", the Uchiha therefore said, unfazed by the violent lashings of chakra and plant-life around him, even tolerating the vines protectively wrapping around his ankles. "How can you-" "It doesn't", Madara interrupted unfazed. "Because at this point, you have already killed me; nothing you do now will change that fact. But once we get back home-" their home, the real one, not this wrong and twisted future full or wrongness and bitter taste, "You can change things by actively trying *not* to kill me."

Freeing himself of those far too clingy raspberries around his legs, he stepped aside, obviously deeming the topic dealt with, his eyes rotating once again… only for the Uchiha to snarl in anger, kicking the Shimura's battered corpse into the wooden dragon surrounding them. "Fucking great", he snapped, his earlier calm forgotten within a single moment. "Now it's too late!"

Ah, Hashirama thought, just the slightest bit sheepish. So Madara's reverse-ability was indeed bound to a specific time-frame… and apparently, he had passed it, by now. "I'm so-" Madara's lifted forefinger interrupted him. "Don't you fucking start now", he warned. "I was merely halfway done and now he's fucking dead!" He went after the body, dragging the Shimura back to the plaza. He didn't know exactly how long he was able to force time into reverse; his unfamiliarity with his own eyes a particular weak point since he had refrained from using his Mangekyou Sharingan for numerous reasons up until he had fought Kurama to ensure Konoha's protection. And after… well, there simply had been no need. He had trained embarrassingly little, too caught up in politics and the handling of Hashirama's ass (in both, bedroom and office). However; one thing was certain, the Shimura's death had been too long ago to be reverse-able anymore. Fucking ruined.

"You owe me for that, Senju", he hissed. "Big time!"

To his favour, Hashirama had the decency to be chagrined. "I am truly sorry", he offered, and wasn't it remarkable how now, he was the calm one once more?

From seemingly out of nowhere, Madara pulled forth a small sealing-scroll, barely half a palm wide, carefully placing it on the ground. And then, with a care that belied his earlier bruteness, he removed the implanted Sharingan, carefully sealing each eyeball into the scroll. He wished he would have been able to offer that first eye the same justice, after tearing it out of the Shimura's face… but that eye in particular had been too powerful to be left in place, even though Madara didn't know its full capabilities.

His cousin would understand.

"Get that thing out of my face", the Uchiha finally ordered, once he was done. With a snarl, the wooden dragon around them closed in, its head snapping forward… and with a crunch none of the witnesses would ever forget, its teeth dug into Danzō's limp figure, crushing bones and skull and tearing apart flesh before the construct swallowed, devouring the mutilated body of Root's leader.

"We are not done talking about this", Hashirama announced, making Madara roll his eyes. "Neither are we about *this*", he quipped, pointing at Tsunade with a slender thump, before turning around to make his way to the current Hokage and the bunch of Anbu surrounding her.

"I expect an explanation." Despite the situation, Tsunade's voice was steady as she spoke, nothing betraying the uneasiness she had to feel – leaving Shizune at her side speechless as she couldn't supress the bone-deep shudder, as the Uchiha's piercing eyes glided over her. The Sharingan wasn't seen on the streets anymore, ever since the massacre and the advanced Mangekyou Sharingan had few outsiders ever witnessed outside of a fight -and even fewer lived to tell the tale.

He was… a strangely beautiful man, Shizune thought. His face was fair, contrasting his ebony hair and she wondered whether the rumours of Uchiha growing their hair until they lost a battle were true. After all, the stories knew him to be the only one the First Hokage had to go all out against in a fight. There were no images left of him other than that larger than life statue (there had been more than once a demand to tear it down) and thus, she was

surprised to see him this… slender. Shoudaime-sama stood a full head taller than him and it was uncanny the two of them were… close.

It was common knowledge Senju Hashirama had killed Uchiha Madara after the latter had turned on the village, however; no one knew *why*… and as far as she could tell, nobody had ever wondered. The Shoudaime had protected the village when Uchiha Madara had attempted to destroy it. That was all that mattered. But apparently… not all there was to that story.

Tobirama was sleeping on the table.

But well, since that meant he actually *was* sleeping, for the first time since the battle, Mito placed a silencer-tag on his back, effectively sealing any sound before it reached his ears. Izuna had been the first one to head home for actual sleep, his battered constitution taking the choice off of him, but he had arrived back at the office around two hours ago. Kakuzu apparently had modelled his body enough to warrant sleep no longer mandatory or at least only needed in far less intervals (lucky bastard).

So far, there were no news whatsoever about Kumogakure's shinobi -or rather, what was left of them- but without their Kage (both, the official one and the Uchiha who told him what to do) they couldn't merely go after them.

Tobirama had taken it up on himself to form a scout-squad, effectively spreading a reliable network within a few hours in case something unexpected happened from Kumogakure's side. Meanwhile, Mito had attempted to contact Uzushiogakure, but so far had neither a reply, nor any knowledge whether her message had even been received in the Whirlpool. Because even though she indeed had recognised a lot of Uzumaki during the battle, there had been a far greater number not present during it… or at least, not at the actual battlefield. And while only few Uzumaki had taken the leap of faith and moved to Konoha, many more had to be at least uncomfortable with her father's lead against the Senju. If there was still a way to do so, she needed to figure out what happened to tear a rift that deep, as it couldn't merely be rooted in Hashirama's rejection of her (and hers of him).

Anyway; after sending her letter of, Mito had taken a nap as well, but unlike Tobirama's, hers had actually been planned.

And apparently, it had done wonders.

"I have an idea."

Immediately, she had full attention of everyone else in the room. Well, minus the currently sleeping one that made exactly two people but considering who they were, it was still quite a feat. "The Hiraishin is a basically a summoning technique, teleporting the user into a dimensional void and from there right to the target seal." Both, Izuna and Kakuzu nodded. Neither of them -especially not Izuna- were able to offer the depth of understanding Tobirama and Mito were able to come up with for this particular topic.

“We have already successfully tested the Hiraishin-Timeleap combination; we know the dimensional void is even able to cross time if the target-seal has done so, as well.”

Again, the two of them nodded. It hadn’t even been that long ago; their shared success of Tobirama being able to use his newly developed jutsu to teleport to Izuna, twenty seconds to the future. Ever since then, they had attempted to connect Izuna’s time-leaps, as to lengthen the spans but so far, they had remained unsuccessful.

“We have no idea, where they are… and Tobirama’s attempt in using the Hiraishin to teleport to Hashirama has failed.” Because of course, Tobirama had put one of his seals on Hashirama; he had started putting them *everywhere*. Izuna was waiting for the day the Senju’d consider actually walking to the toilet beneath him and just teleport right on the seat.

“We therefore concluded: Whatever happened has either damaged the seal” Which Tobirama had claimed to be extremely unlikely, “Or they are beyond the Hiraishin’s limits.” Which was far more probable, because if they’d just stranded in in some other shinobi-country, even with Tobirama’s seal unworking, they would have found a way to at least message… if they were still alive, but that was an option neither of them wanted to ponder about too much.

Mito lifted two fingers. “That means out of the two summoning limits, we can exclude space as the confining one.” She lowered one finger for effect. “That leaves us with only one more. And that one is time. At any given moment, no summoner is ever able to summon anything not within their respective present-time.” Or rather, that had been the rule… right until the moment Tobirama had summoned himself to the future (technically, Izuna was probably the first, but they were still debating about how the Uchiha’s eyes were able to achieve a feat considered impossible before. Izuna had been rather uninterested about that and had proceeded to appear in Kakuzu’s lap three seconds later). “But if Tobirama was able to summon himself across time to you…” “He might be able to summon himself across time to wherever those two are”, Kakuzu concluded.

Izuna frowned. “But we don’t know where… or when… they are. That one time was twenty seconds only and Tobirama nearly collapsed. If they’d been close it should have worked when Tobirama tried… Besides, we don’t even know if we’re on the right track with this.”

The masked assassin lifted one of his dark eyebrows, facing the Uchiha. “You, being pessimistic?”, he asked, making Izuna sigh uncharacteristically deeply. “My brother is somewhere, somewhen, and even about that we can’t be certain. And I’m useless without my eyes… excuse me for not being a joy.”

Motherly instincts kicking in, Mito made her way over to him (making sure to louden her steps enough for him to easily notice) and clasped his slender shoulders. His brother’s loss had taken Izuna hard, maybe even harder than Tobirama, because without access to his eyes (or rather, access not addended with unbearable pain) he felt rather helpless. “If there’s anyone able to find them, it’s us”, she said. “And if there’s anyone able to survive whatever happened, it’s them.”

“Tobirama collapsed because his body is weak”, Kakuzu deemed. “Mine is not; I am certain I will be able to bear the physical effects.” No, he wasn’t.

Mito nodded. “We only need to figure out how to overcome the time-barrier between the summoner and the target. People have invited more complicated jutsu.” No, they hadn’t.

Once more, Izuna sighed. “Let’s just get them home.” They had to.

Chapter End Notes

Why did Madara bully the Anbu instead of making a kage bunshin to tell people to chill the frig out?
Because those were invented by Tobirama when he was Second Hokage, which hasn’t happened yet for this variant of Madara. Know your history, bitches! (Or maybe he already did in this AU but the TVA showed up to get him pruned… we’ll never know!)

Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

> I proof-read this chapter exactly once, like five minutes ago, and as it's past 2am that means there are probably still a ton of mistakes here.
> But I just wanted to post this and offer something to you after all the delays!
> I'll answer all of your wonderfull comments tomorrow, I promise! Right now I'm so tired I'd just mess everything up... But I am SO glad you are sticking with me! If means the world to me, whenever one of you takes the time to write a few (or a few more) words! There's no bigger motivation than that :)
>
> Also, I noticed Shizune kinda turned into an ooc version of herself in this story... But meh, I really tried to keep everyone else in character, so I hope it's not that bad. And yes, that even includes Madara, as in this story, I always imagine him as the boy we get to see in Hashirama's flash-back to the river-meetings: Hot-mouthed, with zero tolerance for bullshit, but in his core deeply kind. Except a little more murderous, I guess. But adulting does that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shizune remembered a lot strange situations she had encountered at Tsunade’s side -a far lot of them during her absence from the village. Experiencing the God of Shinobi’s presence had been unbelievable -even though everything Tsunade-sama had ever told her about him on the rare occasions she spoke about her childhood memories had been proven to be true. He had been a humble man, far too cheery and easy-going for the titles that had been bestowed upon him.

Until he hadn’t.

His capabilities were famed generations after his death, his power craved from the cultured remains of his cells… and still unreached.

She couldn’t remember ever seeing something more terrifying than this gigantic wooden construct, as the dragon had clawed its way into the streets; that sickening crunch as it had devoured Danzō-sama, the maw dwarfing his body… even in all her years studying under Tsunade-sama, she had never encountered anything even close. The Shoudaime was famed for not only having raised but also protecting the village upon Uchiha Madara’s rampage but right now, the roles seemed to be reversed.

They had gotten back to the apartment Lord First and the Uchiha had spent the night in, as the Shoudaime had refused Tsunade-sama’s attempt at moving the conversation the Hokage’s office, claiming he wanted to look after Sai and the two Anbu who involuntarily had stayed

behind. Which had proven to be a rather good idea on the Senju's part, considering all three were unconscious.

At the sight of it, Uchiha Madara had merely rolled his eyes. "Maybe cut down with that sleep-pollen", he drawled, making the Shoudaime protest how it hadn't been that and he wouldn't summon any of it in their actual living-room and at least one of the Sensors had fainted from chakra-overexposure which had not been *his* doing, after all.

It would have been crowded, with the Anbu from the plaza still accompanying them, but Tsunade-hime had ordered them to re-establish order and even more importantly, not lose a word about what they had witnessed. While she seemed confident, Shizune was rather certain she didn't entirely know how to handle this situation herself -and how could she be blamed?

Lord First was the one every Hokage, every shinobi in Konoha strived after, willing to sacrifice his own life for the village and its people, the ever unparalleled God of Shinobi and even today his cells promised power far beyond imagination.

Shizune averted her eyes, telling herself not to stare… which unfortunately resulted in merely staring at someone else.

Uchiha Madara was the one whose name alone still made shinobi shiver to this very day and with all those stories told about him, in a hushed voice hidden beneath a covering hand… she had expected something different. He was intimidating in a whole different way but above all she had always imagined someone… else. That mane of unruly hair was infamous until today but she had always imagined the very last Uchiha patriarch to be… bigger. In more ways than one. She had never really thought about it, but seeing him next to the Shoudaime made her realise they weren't even close in height. Lord First was nearly a full head taller, his shoulders wider and overall, he had a whole amount of muscle-mass the Uchiha was missing. In fact, he was *too* slender to be a shinobi in his prime; while quite obviously built for speed, he nevertheless was just that bit too thin, only enough to make it noticeable to the trained eye but existent nevertheless.

"Tsunade."

His voice was deeper than expected and always carried a slight drawl to it, making her wonder whether it was intended or not.

"What do you know of Root?", he asked, once the Shoudaime had carefully moved the three unconscious shinobi onto the sofa as to spare them an awakening on the floor… whenever they would wake up, that was.

Tsunade frowned. "Root?", she asked. "As in plant-root? I would suggest as much as any average person." Maybe more if it came to medical effects.

His piercing eyes never leaving her face, the Uchiha kept quiet for a moment. "Root", he then repeated, "As the organisation lead by that filth of a man we just got rid of."

Shizune blinked in surprise. Danzō-sama was a respected man within the village, but he was no leader of any organisation. He was known… had been known… to be a close advisor to

Lord Third, though.

For another moment, the Uchiha watched her face, searching for even the slightest hint of a lie, as Tsunade answered: “I have never heard of an organisation named Root, much less one within Konohagakure.”

The room was quiet after that, the loudest sound the unconscious Anbu breathing deep in sleep. Then, the Uchiha’s lips thinned even further. “This village… is rotten from the inside.”

The Shoudaime stepped next to him, lowering a hand onto his slim shoulder. “I suspect, Root is no subordinate to the Hokage?”, he asked. Madara had always been hot-headed, but for him to actively seek out this man -even before being aware of the Sharingan he had implanted himself- the situation had to be have been… dire.

The Uchiha made a face, lips wrinkling into a disgusted expression that just didn’t seem to fit with his delicate features. “I didn’t dig too deep as to not cause lingering damage”, he explained and Hashirama nodded, apparently understanding what he was referring to. If one took into account the three unconscious Anbu, lingering seemed to have a slightly different meaning to him. Then, he turned back to Tsunade. “Root does not answer the Hokage, the only orders they obey are the Shimura’s… or rather were.” He crossed his arms. “How much of a failure this village is, if it cannot even protect its own children”, he growled, features darkening even more. His slender fingers started drumming on his arms in obvious dissatisfaction and it was nowhere near obvious, only barely visible in the slightest hint in form and colour if one knew the symptoms but –

“Oxygen shortage.”

It was said before she had even fully realised it and just as fast, Shizune had clasped her mouth with her own hands at the realisation of just having called out the obvious diagnosis. The Uchiha had slaughtered Danzō-sama there was no way to even imagine- but maybe he wouldn’t realise she had meant him, she could have-

Those slender fingers with their just ever so slightly blueish nails stopped drumming. However; the one who spoke up was not him but Lord First. “Amazing!” His grin entirely misplaced within the whole situation, he turned to her. “How did you notice? He isn’t showing any signs yet, even though I was rather certain. But I didn’t want to bring the matter up in company because-” “The next sign you’ll get is my foot in your ass, drop it!” “Because of that”, the Shoudaime sighed, unfazed by Shizune’s heavy flinch upon the Uchiha patriarch’s threat.

Despite the situation, Tsunade-sama was a medic-nin. She would always be one, first and foremost, and merely her focus on her grandfather within this unforeseen situation had stopped her from noticing this minuscule detail herself. “You are suffering from lung-inefficiency?”, she asked.

“No, I just consider breathing overrated”, the Uchiha snapped back, however; somehow this was far less intimidating than his deadly calm fury.

Next to him, Lord First guffawed. “Don’t be like that, darling”, he laughed, his smooth voice somehow easing up the situation. “Who knows how far medical nin-jutsu has developed since our time!” And wasn’t even saying that weird. “Maybe there’s a far better way to treat-” “If anyone but you tries to get even close to my lungs, I’ll rip their hands off.”

And once again, it was this single detail, one that apparently neither Lord First nor the Uchiha paid any attention to… and this time, it was Tsunade who called it out, her voice uncharacteristically tight as suddenly, all those little hints fitted together seamlessly, paving the way to one conclusion only. “You are… involved.”

Next to her, Shizune swallowed, feeling her face pale at an alarming rate and then…

The Shoudaime laughed.

Loud and cheery, a genuinely happy laughter, as little patches of daisies and dandelions bloomed around his feet, the dandelions’ yellow blossoms caressing the Uchiha’s ankles. And then, he *winked*. “You have no idea how hard it was to get to him”, he exclaimed, still grinning merrily. “When I first kissed him, he kicked me right through the house and broke my arm!” And to make matters even more abstruse, he seemed even happy about it!

And only now that the shoe had finally dropped, Shizune saw the depth of affection as Lord First smiled at the Uchiha next to him. The one who had abandoned the village right after its foundation, only to return in an attempt to annihilate all the Shoudaime had done so far, the clans he had gathered. The only one able to stand against Lord First, even if in the end, the Shoudaime always remained victorious, even though the Uchiha’s mere name made whole nations tremble in fear at the demise it carried.

The one who now looked away, nearly abashed at the Shoudaime’s declaration, mass of raven hair hiding his face. “If you rub it into everyone’s nose, I’ll kick you out of the apartment.”

Once again, Lord First laughed, stretching out his hand but retreating again as the Uchiha glared at him. Then, he turned towards the two women once more. “This village”, Lord First explained, his face turning solemn again, “Was raised because we wanted to stop children from growing up on battle-fields, not even getting old enough to drink before being slaughtered.” For a moment, he kept silent. “When we founded Konohagakure, we did so to protect the children and to allow them to have the childhood we had been bereft of. But if children are forced to join the military ranks, if they are already doomed to the fate we attempted to free them from… then Konoha defies its own purpose.”

And for some reason, those words sounded like a threat to Shizune, because if the Shoudaime indeed decided the village was a mistake… She didn’t want to follow this train of thought; Lord First had prioritized the village above all else, even the life of the man he had been in love with, before he married Uzumaki Mito -or after? She wasn’t certain, even so much as trying to think about what was happening was nothing less than terrifying!

“And we haven’t even taken into consideration how Kurama is sealed into a twelve-year old.”

“… What?”

“You heard that right”, the Uchiha gave back, finally turning back to the Shoudaime. “I met that kid on the streets -and by the way, there is no way the brat isn’t some kind of descendant, his taste in fashion is at least as ridiculous as yours.” A few coughs interrupted him and once more, his delicate features twisted at the unpleasantness but nevertheless, he brushed off Hashirama’s hands. He might have overtaxed his body (again) while dealing with that Shimura but he still had some kind of dignity left! “Something stroke me as strange, so I followed him home. He had one hell of a seal on his abdomen; no way it doesn’t involve Uzumaki-work. I entered the seal-phase and found Kurama, but-” “So why didn’t you get him out of there!”

“Because there was no way for me to do so without killing the kid”, Madara snapped back. “The seal has been applied years ago, no way he did that himself! Besides-”

“Tsunade.”

And just like that, the Shoudaime’s eyes had lost their benevolent glint, the ever-smiling mouth was thinned into a sharp line and even though she was no Sensor, Shizune could feel the rustling of chakra right underneath his skin.

“I expect an explanation. Be fast.”

Tsunade’s lips had thinned as well, and for a moment, Madara could easily see how she came after her grandfather. There was that stubbornness in her jaw, the determination in her eyes that just screamed Hashirama. “The Ninetails broke free on the day of Naruto’s birth. The Fourth Hokage re-sealed it into Naruto, sacrificing his own and his wife’s life in the process.”

Hashirama opened his mouth, but this time, it was Madara who lifted his hand in a silencing gesture, before his hasty Kage could ask about the boy’s whereabouts and just run off. “You say he *broke free*. I’ll assume he was already sealed prior to that. Who-?” Dared to? Was able to? Would even *want* to? For once, not even Madara knew how to properly end the question, so he just let it hang in the air unfinished, waiting for an answer.

“Uzumaki Mito sealed the Ninetails into herself after it was used to attack the village with. Later, it was re-sealed into Uzumaki Kushina, the Fourth Hokage’s wife.” Shizune didn’t miss how the fact it had been Uchiha Madara who attacked the village was entirely left out… she didn’t know if she would have been able to have the mind-set to be that attentive under the Shoudaime’s gaze. He had already made his dissatisfaction more than clear, if they told him not that- “*Who* attacked the village?” And just like that, there went that hope down the drain, Shizune thought, shuddering at the Uchiha’s piercing gaze. What were they supposed to do, this was disastrous!

“You did.”

For a few heart-beats, time seemed to stand still right after Tsunade had answered, negating her previous attempt to keep that particular detail unsaid.

Then, a single tear rolled down the Shoudaime’s face, as he put two and two together, because despite it all he wasn’t *dumb*. “I killed you”, he whispered, his earlier anger entirely drowned in a seemingly unending wave of grief. He raised his hand to caress the Uchiha’s

face, merely to lower it right before he made contact, not daring to touch him. “You realised what would happen, you knew that we had failed… and I killed you for whatever happened after that.” His eyes lowered and he noticed his hands shaking but didn’t know whether it hailed from grief or anger. If that was what would happen, it was better to tear down every single house again, send the clans on their way as soon as they made it back to their time and-
“Hashirama.”

Another tear joined the first as his shoulders shook silently. A small one, little but sincere, a strange opposite to the large alligator-teats so often involved in his moods. “This future might be the worst possible outcome”, Madara agreed. “But why should you have believed me, even if I *had* known for whatever reason? We don’t know-”

“The village was ours, Madara”, the Shoudaime said, his voice not even angry anymore, merely beaten. “But all I see… is me. I see my face on the mountain, I see my brother’s. I see my grand-daughter in the Hokage’s office. I saw a park when I had a look around, they named it Senju. I didn’t see one single momentum of you. What you achieved, what you sacrificed.” Ever so slowly, he shook his head. “This reality… is a nightmare.”

“I am searching for the… Hokage.”

“In that case, we have a common goal”, Izuna answered dryly. Three women stood in front of him, alongside one of the scout-squads that had picked them up, as they had been on their way to the village’s general direction. Which wouldn’t have been too concerning, if they hadn’t stayed parallel to one of the (new) main-routes crossing the forest, while always keeping enough distance to the actual street to stay out of view from any other travellers.

The scout-squad -one of those Tobirama had assigned to keep attention to whatever Kumogakure might be up to- had gathered them up and for some reason just brought them right into the village, right to the first leader-ish person they came across.

Which had happened to be him, rather than Tobirama or Mito or even Kakuzu, unfortunately.

“I did not know how else to contact the Hidden Leaf Village… My father is not at his senses anymore-” Izuna lifted a hand. He was *so* not ready to deal with some civilian’s parental-issues. He had just taken a break to get something for lunch. The three of them had been brooding in the Hokage’s office until Tobirama woke up from his involuntary nap at the desk, instantly updating from the three of them brooding to the four of them brooding. They had made progress, but at some point Izuna just needed some air and at least one conversation that didn’t topic seals and eyes.

Which had led him to the ramen vendor -or rather, *on the way* to the ramen vendor. He hadn’t even made it all the way down there to get his food (which was causative in the walk being a little more challenging due to his missing eye-sight but in truth just meant he had intended to drag his break just a little longer) before the squad had found him. And why were they even talking to him, he wasn’t part of the administrative rangs! Well, Madara wasn’t either, technically, and still was the once in command right next to Hashirama so he couldn’t even fault them for that, probably. Didn’t change the fact it sucked.

… But it got him an idea.

“We’ll head to the tower”, he decided. He would drop those people at Tobirama and then fuck right off again. Maybe he’d take another nap; even though his eyes had been pinched off, his head was still pounding unhappily. Some kind of civilian problem would also help the others to get their heads out of the currently pressing topic for a few minutes. Kami knew they all needed it.

Izuna’s shoulder brushed the doorframe a little too hard when he entered the building a few minutes later and he resisted the urge to make a face. Being blind sucked! Especially if one wanted to uphold some kind of dignity and walk a proper speed. “Follow me”, he ordered, meaning both, the three newcomers and the squad-team. Tobirama would surely like a full report of what had happened.

He quickly made it up the stairs, keeping count to avoid stumbles, and unceremoniously opened the office-door. “I picked something up, unfortunately it isn’t food.”

Behind him, the civilians entered hesitatingly and behind his blindfold, Izuna blinked once at the sudden silence, before Tobirama finally spoke up.

“Welcome to Konohagakure, Sakuya-hime.”

Chapter End Notes

> If you recognise those visitors, you'll get an imaginary cookie. But not from Hashirama, he'll probably add raisins because those are healthier than cocolate-chips.

Chapter 47

Chapter Summary

> Two dorks having an emotional roler-coaster. Then, three dorks having an emotional roler-coaster. Finally, four dorks having an emotional roler-coaster.
> The author didn't plan for any of that to happen.

Chapter Notes

> It's nearly 2 am again and I won't be able to answer your wonderful comments before my eyes refuse to work for tonight... I'm sorry for being so unreliable! I will answer tomorrow, I promise! My greatest thanks to every single one of you for writing, I read your comments over and over again!
> I never answer right away because I don't artifically want to increase the number of comments for the current chapters... But I guess by now, that's nonesense? I don't know, by now I've gotten so used to answering right after an update, that I fear I'll disappoint you when you see my answer without another chapter xD
>
> Also: Do I need to update the tags? I have no idea, tbh, what should I even write? "A bunch of dorks sucking at time-travel from both, ancient and current Konoha"?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Leave us.”

“The previous Hokage died not even two months ago and I had no intention to take over for him when I was asked.” Tsunade straightened her back. “I try to do my best and follow your path, but I have no guidance. I am sorry I have disappointed you.”

“Lord First, we never-”

“I said: Leave us!” It was the very first time he had ever heard something akin to a snarl in Hashirama’s voice and the ground underneath their feet cracked in a display of power Madara wasn’t certain had been intended.

Shizune went even paler than she had already been and stumbled back, nearly tripping. Her gaze fell on Madara of all people who slightly shook his head and nodded towards the door. Hashirama was upset, more so than he had ever been since the Rikari-incident and a little time by himself was best for him -as long as he didn’t work himself up too much.

When the two of them left, Hashirama watched him.

When the door fell shut, he still did.

And then, with a speed usually reserved for the battle-field, he sank to the ground, his chestnut hair spilling on the floor, as he kneeled in a perfect dogeza. “I am so sorry.” The words in their simplicity seemed to mock him; how dare he pretend four little words would make up what he had done… Even if Madara would ever turn against the village, he would only do so with great reason; how could Hashirama just… just… Unbiddenly, the memories of that nightmare so long ago crawled up within him and he could feel hot tears on his face, dropping into his hair due to the awkward position. He had seen it, had stabbed Madara in the back, a mockery of how the raven hated having people standing behind him. The blood had coated his hands, his torn clothes, everything and- his head jerked up, as a cool palm caressed his cheek.

The raven’s face was strangely solemn and Hashirama could feel fresh tears burning on his skin as they made their way down his cheeks. “If you… If you hate me now, I’ll understand”, he whispered hoarsely -strange, his throat didn’t act up in years. “When we’re back to our time, I will disperse the village and send the clans away; the Uchiha can take everything they want to, then I’ll tear the rest down.” The left side of Madara’s mouth lifted into something that was a little too sad to be a smile. He was on the right track, it just wasn’t enough yet! He would have to make certain nothing ever happened to him, that he stayed safe, stayed happy, even if it was countries away from Hashirama!

A cool palm caressed his face, the gesture strangely tender for the Uchiha. His head snapped up a little further. How could he stand touching him, after everything that had happened… would happen. Or rather, would not! He wouldn’t allow it to!

“Look at me, Hashirama.”

Without even hesitating a single second, he raised his head, facing spinning tomoe, and didn’t even try to stop the gen-jutsu from taking over. Whatever happened, he deserved it tenfold, he would bear it. He wouldn’t be as selfish as to beg Madara to stay by his side despite of what happened, he couldn’t- *Love*. The feeling washed over him like a tidal wave, drowning everything in its path and very nearly him, too. *Love, tenderness, affection, lust, love, love.* He gasped for air, trying to claw a way through the overwhelming emotions, *love, concern* , while at the same time he didn’t want to, not truly. It was just so much, all-consuming, filling every part of his heart, his whole being, *love, worry.*

And then, it stopped and he gasped for breath, yearning for what he had just lost while at the same time relieved to be no longer drowning in the sheer all-consuming depth of emotion. A pair of blood-red irises stared back into his own. “How could I ever hate you, Hashirama.”

He didn’t even notice the tears until they dripped down his chin again, the salt drying on his lips because this had been Madara. That overwhelming love, nearly frightening in its intensity was for *him*. “You shouldn’t”, he whispered. “Not with what I have done…”

“As far as it concerns me, you haven’t done anything yet”, Madara informed him mildly. “I would even go as far as to say you are the reason I still am alive, after all. And besides…”,

his voice got more serious, now, “I am an Uchiha, Hashirama. Once I love, I do so unconditionally. I know for others, it might seem *intense*”, he dragged the word, as though it annoyed him to say it, “But I cannot change it. Not anymore. I feel what I feel and I will do so until the very end.”

He frowned in confusion, as his confession merely made further tears roll down Hashirama’s face. Did he say something wrong? He didn’t exaggerate, not even in the slightest; whenever Uchiha loved they did so with everything they had to offer, not caring about the circumstances. It was both, a blessing and a curse and he knew of quite a few examples how such love had turned into tragedy. But he had merely aimed to reassure Hashirama of his feelings; whatever had happened to them in this village’s past didn’t mean it had to happen to them, as well. Maybe he was wrong and he would still die at Hashirama’s hands but… it wasn’t as though he had another choice, not really. He was very aware -despite never having talked about it- that losing Hashirama at this point would tear at his sanity at best, shred it to pieces at worst. The only one he loved as much as him was Izuna and even though those kinds of love differed greatly, they were nonetheless equal in size.

Something touched his hand and he blinked, focussing back on Hashirama. Still on his knees in front of him, the Senju took his hand with feather-light touches. Ever so carefully, he lifted it to his lips, kissing the tip of each finger, before kissing his palm, the touch so soft it nearly seemed to be an imagination.

Despite himself, Madara felt the hint of heat rise on his cheeks. What was that stupid Senju even doing, they didn’t have time to- “I will protect you.” Madara felt lips thin. How dare he imply Madara couldn’t do so himself, how dare he imply he was *weak*! Despite of what had just happened, he didn’t have to right to- “Even from myself, if necessary.” Another feather-light kiss, this time to the scarred back of his hand. Despite himself, Madara felt the heat on his cheeks rising even further, when the stupid Senju turned it around a pressed another kiss on his palm.

He flinched, as the heavy clunk of something hitting the ground interrupted the intimacy, and turned around. The movement tugged his hand out of Hashirama’s grasp. More than anything else, Hashirama wanted to hold on, to never let go, but… He had lost all privilege to be the one to hold on. He would be there as long as Madara wanted him, cherish every second, because the moment the raven decided to not be able to bear it, to not be able to be with the man who had… done *that*, he would let go. It would tear his heart to pieces, but it was the right thing to do. True love, he realised, was always about the other, never about oneself.

He turned towards the kitchen-door, too. The boy’s eyes were wide with fear, his pale face nearly non-existent in taint. “You are-”

“Apparently supposed to be dead”, Madara noticed, probably a bit too sharply, as the boy in front of him grew even paler, if that was possible. He desperately tried to pull himself together, stomp down the fear, *emotions are a hindrance*, he had to regain control, *you will overcome that burden*, “Sai-kun.”

A second ticked down, before a large smile showed on his face. “Hello.”

“That is the saddest smile I have ever seen”, the second man whispered, and somehow he seemed saddened by saying it. It wasn’t right; smiles were supposed to make people like him, he needed them to- And then, his gaze fell on the man, who was unimportant because he was kneeling. Nobody important kneeled, that was common sense.

And then, he felt his legs growing weak. “Shoudaime.”

Danzō-sama had even talked about him, on multiple occasions, how despite his reputation, the First Hokage had been weak, not controlling his emotions. They weren’t taught history, it was unimportant to the mission, but even Root knew those faces watching over Konoha. Not doing so would be too much of a risk for exposure.

The man smiled at him and somehow, it seemed different than Sai’s own smile. He didn’t even lift the edges of his mouth far enough, it was no proper smile! The man got up from the floor and when he took a step into his direction, Sai involuntarily retreated back. Despite Danzō-sama’s aversion against him, the man carried a strange aura of power. Noticing his uneasiness (showing emotions, showing weakness, a disgrace to Root, a disgrace to-) the Shoudaime stopped his steps. He was tall, far taller than expected, especially in comparison to Uchiha Madara.

“I- I was supposed to follow-”

“Ah, about that”, the Shoudaime laughed sheepishly -was it that? Sai couldn’t be sure- and a moment later, a familiar image flickered to life, covering his body. “Sorry”, he said, his voice slightly hilted by the jutsu and Sai forced himself to stay put instead or retreating further. The jutsu dropped, leaving behind the Shoudaime again and he couldn’t- He didn’t-

“I am sorry for overwhelming you.” His head snapped up, meeting Uchiha Madara’s eyes - black as the night, his Sharingan retreated. “It wasn’t my intention.”

“I-”, the boy choked, as the dots connected. That had been-. “I didn’t-”

“*You* didn’t do anything, that’s for sure”, the Uchiha interrupted calmly. “But I needed answers and you were the only one able to offer them. I didn’t dig deeper than I had to but I lost my temper and unfortunately, you were the one to suffer for it.”

For the first time he could remember, Sai felt ultimately, entirely overstrained. This, all of it, was just… how should he have been able to prepare for this, it was just too much, it was- “Just consider it an awesome story to share with your friends”, the Shoudaime offered, winking at him in an obvious attempt to brighten his mood. It merely left Sai even more unsettled. “Friends?”, he blurted, before forcing himself to shut up again. He needed to get a grip, he had to- “Friendship was considered debilitating”, Uchiha Madara explained, a strange tilt in his voice Sai wasn’t able to identify. “An obstacle in the absolute commitment to Root.”

For some reason, that had the Shoudaime shocked. Of course it would, Sai thought. Danzō-sama had more than once denounced his emotional weakness. He already had Shin, he didn’t need anyone else! Friendship was prohibited for a reason; Root stood above everything, Danzō-sama’s authority was the highest possible!

“Friends are the most valuable thing”, the Shoudaime exclaimed, clearly aghast. “Without friendship, without love, what is there to fight for? What is there to protect? A life without friendship, without love, is just cruel!”

Madara’s lips thinned. Obviously, Hashirama’s most intense drive to forge this village - friendship and love, the lines had always blurred between them, now that he thought about it- had been forsaken. There was no greater drive than love, except perhaps hatred. Nothing could grow without love and Hashirama always had so much of it to spare for everyone, it was no wonder the village thrived underneath it. Having it succumb to these levels seemed like the most cruel joke.

“Follow me.”

Feeling strangely numb, Sai watched as the Shoudaime immediately turned around, obeying without a moment of hesitation. So much for the God of Shinobi, he deemed, if the village’s traitor had him at his bidding with a single order.

“That includes you, Sai.”

And just like that, a wave of emotion washed over him, he was unable to name. He couldn’t just- Out of nothing but thin air, a large and warm palm clasped his shoulder and he looked up, meeting the grinning face of the First Hokage. “Madara’s plans are usually rather good. Let’s give it a shot, shall we?”

Still numb, Sai nodded. This was what it had to feel to have a Bijuu step upon one, he thought, as once more without weaving signs, a gen-jutsu covered Uchiha Madara, warping his features into rougher shapes, his hair now dark blonde and far shorter. A dangerous choice; if someone got close enough they would still feel the hidden hair underneath the jutsu… and there was a lot of it. Long hair was a liability, nothing but a hindrance. Why would anybody choose to handicap themselves with it, he thought, as he watched Lord First rush through a few simple hand-signs to hide underneath his by now familiar henge.

If he’d be able to, Sai would have covered himself with his familiar mask, but somewhere in the Hokage’s office, it had disappeared. He wanted to have it back, but didn’t dare asking. Maybe it wouldn’t matter too much, there were few people after all, who might recognise him.

Nevertheless, he positioned himself in an angle hidden from the street, as they made their way across the roof-tops. If would have been less conspicuous to merely walk, Sai thought, as he watched the two others from the corner of his eye. Uchiha Madara was weak, he deemed. Even with the gen-jutsu granting another inch in size, he was still far smaller than the Shoudaime. Furthermore, he left himself utterly open for attack, not shielding his back against a man who was quite obviously stronger. It was no wonder he had been defeated.

“I still think these houses are entirely weird, how can anyone like them?”, Senju Hashirama mumbled, as the Uchiha opened the door to an apartment-complex. There were so many of them in the village, he had no idea who thought having so many people live cramped together was a good idea.

“You are entirely weird and people still like you”, Uchiha Madara answered and the God of Shinobi… he couldn’t believe his eyes, the God of Shinobi *pouted*. Danzō-sama was entirely right; not only was the man a slave to his own emotions, he didn’t even have a single shred of dignity! The Shoudaime was named the strongest shinobi in history, but it had been nearly a century since he had lived! Danzō-sama considered history useless and now Sai understood why. Even more so, not only was it useless, it also was completely wrong, warped with the years. This man was nothing but a ruse, a joke! Nothing more than an imagination for the people of Konoha to marvel at.

Without bothering to slip out of his shoes (there weren’t even Tatami-mats in here!) Madara opened the door and entered. A boy startled at the unexpected visitors, flinching in his cheap chair, before exclaiming: “Hey, it’s you! I remember you, thanks for helping me with the-” “Naruto”, the Uchiha interrupted, not bothering with politeness of any kind anymore as he nodded towards the boy who accompanied him. “This is Sai. He wants to be your friend.”

What?

The boy’s face brightened up, clearly delighted by the possibility and only now, Sai offered enough attention to fully recognise him. Uzumaki Naruto, the Nine-Tails jinchuuriki. The boy was a danger to the village, the monster inside him had nearly destroyed it twice, already! There was a reason contact to him was prohibited and- “I’m Naruto and I’m gonna be Hokage one day! My favourite food’s ramen, we could go eat some! I’ll even invite you because I just got paid for that last mission!”

A large smile showed up on Sai’s features. “If all you eat is ramen, you will get fat like an Akimichi in no time.”

The silence dragged on a few seconds too long and it left Sai uncertain. He hadn’t said anything wrong, there were no flaws in his statement, so why- “And that is why you need friends”, Uchiha Madara drawled in his awful henge no jutsu, making Senju Hashirama laugh loudly -yet another proof for his emotional instability- as he turned towards the traitor. “Maybe we should try setting you up on a ramen-diet”, he suggested and the Uchiha’s eye twitched. Just as unstable as the Shoudaime. “Maybe we should try setting *you* on abstinence”, he shot back, apparently not referring to food, having the Senju looking absolutely aghast by the idea, stammering something about overreacting.

“They’re weird”, Uzumaki Naruto whispered and despite himself, Sai nodded. “They are”, he agreed, seeing no issue in confirming the obvious.

“Do you know them?”, the jinchuuriki asked and for a moment, Sai hesitated (flaw, always appear certain, don’t leave any openings), before settling for: “No, not really.”

“The blond one’s nice, he helped me with my shopping-bags earlier today”, Naruto whispered back and then they both watched as the Shoudaime cried about how the other man wouldn’t as it’d be unfair to both of them. “I never met them before, they must be new.” Despite having had nearly zero contact with them, Naruto knew the people in his village; one couldn’t become Hokage without knowing whom to order around, after all!

“Two hundred Ryo the tall one wins”, Naruto whispered after a minute, making Sai blink at him. That really wasn’t much but Danzō-sama didn’t hand Root-members any money not strictly necessary for missions and it was just enough to buy that new book Shin was hoping to be able to read… And he already knew Senju Hashirama was utterly devoted to Uchiha Madara, acting at his very command. “He won’t”, Sai muttered back and the jinchuuriki grinned stupidly broad. “Deal!” He offered his hand, having Sai stare at it. “We need to shake hands or it won’t count”, Naruto said, and after another moment, Sai briefly shook it. He wouldn’t let that money slip away merely because of a formality!

They sealed the bet just in time for the Shoudaime to argue how they shouldn’t have this conversation in front of children and Uchiha Madara snapped back how it hadn’t been him who had started it. And then, predicable enough, Senju Hashirama pouted. “Take it back and I’ll invite you to inarizushi?”, he asked and Uchiha Madara rolled his eyes, stating how he wouldn’t have punished himself for the Shoudaime’s missing brains anyway, but there was no way he’d miss that free lunch now.

The Shoudaime laughed loudly, his earlier mood forgotten, and he tenderly pushed back a strand of hair from his companion’s face. A force of habit, probably, since the gen-jutsu still covered the Uchiha’s absolute mess of hair. A small daisy curled itself into the hidden tangles, its blossoms perfectly white and lush.

And just like that, Naruto started screaming.

Chapter End Notes

Kurama's not amused.

Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

So many conclusions.

Chapter Notes

Usually, I always manage to wrap up a chapter in 3k words, 3,5k max.
I started yesterday around 10 pm and was missing around page to that. When I was done, it was 2:30 am and I had written half another chapter (yes, I get done around 500 words the hour on a good run, I'm such a slow writer it's just sad).
But I really liked it and didn't want to delete anything for the sole purpose of staying in my usual word-range. If you're generous, you can consider it my part in the Founders week so I don't feel like a useless lump for not finding the time to participate...
A very beautiful Advent to all of you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I recently re-realised I even drew some crappy stuff back when I had more time -and I even made that. I didn't have a large amount of Copics though, so the colours are far too uniform, but well, I still wanted to share because it was one of my first attempts with copic-markers ^^

///

Despite not being as competent as his little brother when it came to seals, Hashirama was still better versed in fūinjutsu than Madara. He didn't resort to genjutsu either (the only battle-genjutsu he was able to create was a technique of cutting his opponents from of both, sight and sound, leaving them in total darkness. And while he admitted that technique was indeed effective, it was so incredibly boring Madara didn't have any words for it) but instead merely lowered his palm onto Naruto's forehead.

Immediately, the boy stopped screaming and Hashirama caught him as he collapsed, carefully setting him onto the ground. Unlike Madara, he didn't need visual contact to locate the seal, his fingers hovering above the boy's belly button. "Uzumaki-work", he confirmed Madara's assumption. The raven turned towards Sai, who was right next to Hashirama, as he had been standing with Naruto prior to the incident. His facial colour had gotten somewhat more healthy during the last minutes, merely to have dropped back to ashen-white again.

"Don't do something stupid."

It was a rather vague instruction -especially since the Uchiha considered a lot of things stupid- but it was as good as it was going to get, as his attention switched back to Hashirama, who formed a couple of signs, before stopping at the last, offering one of his hands to Madara instead. He identified the halfway formed hare-seal, effortlessly adding his own hand to complete it, and Hashirama lowered the tips of middle and forefinger on Naruto's stomach.

Immediately, he recognised the sound of splashing water and when he turned, Hashirama frowned at the empty space around them. "This seal-area is way too large", the Shoudaime noted. Why would someone make even more effort than already necessary and create so much empty space? He had been able to detect this seal just by looking at the boy; it was far too risky to make it this obvious, it made the child a walking target; every Uzumaki would shake their head at this!

A bone-piercing scream interrupted his judgement, followed by the rattle of metal and quickly, Hashirama re-focussed, swiftly striding towards the seal-centre, Madara right next to him. He knew what Hashirama felt first-hand; the irritation and anger, the unanswered questions.

Another scream caused the water around them to splash and finally, they made it to the seal-core, the large metal gate Madara was already familiar with… and behind it, the Kyuubi thrashed, throwing himself against the ungiving gates and the stone-walls behind it.

"Kurama!"

Instead of an answer, the Bijuu screamed again. "No!", it wailed, "You can't be here. *You can't be!*" Even though already having expected this kind of reaction to Hashirama's call, Madara nevertheless couldn't help but feel disappointed again. "Hashirama-"

Hearing the name, Kurama snarled, an ugly sound full of hatred. "Abomination!"

Hashirama flinched and despite himself, took a step back. He was, he knew he was, had known since he was a child. He had always been difficult. Different. Shinobi with particularly strong elemental affinities tended to be somewhat influenced by their nature. Madara's burning hot temper or Tobirama's calm, collected intelligence were just being two major examples. But for him it had always been… the other way round. He *was* his element, in every aspect that came with it. He was the all-joyful blooming life spring brought in his happiness, just he was the depressed lethargy winter covered the forests with, at other times… and above all, he was the life-force that nature itself was, his every cell yearning to be freed, yearning to bloom and bring forth life.

There was nobody else like him.

And he shouldn't be here, either, as has been whispered in his childhood more than once.

"If you were any different, I wouldn't want you."

Despite himself, Hashirama felt the edge of his mouth curl with a smile. Madara didn't tell him he was perfect, didn't pretend he was normal, and he never would. But he was perfect for him… and even though Tobirama at times was exasperated with his antics, Hashirama knew

his little brother loved him just as much, as he loved him. The thought helped, even though it didn't ease the sting of having his deepest self-doubts claw their way up again.

His focus shifted back to Kurama, who watched them from the farthest edge of his cell, his expression one of uttermost hatred and equally much fear. "I never intended for this to happen, I don't-" The Kyuubi's snarl interrupted him, salvia dripping from his bared teeth, as he pressed himself even deeper into the edge of his cage, his eyes flicking between the two shinobi in front of him, not daring to focus on one of them for too long. "I could… I could break the seal", Hashirama offered, feeling helpless faced with this much fear and hatred. There wasn't a shred of care, a shadow of affection they had shared. "I just need you to-" "I will shred it", Kurama screeched, his red eyes manic. "I will shred this boy's mind to pieces, if you enslave me to your Uzumaki-wife again!"

A second passed.

Then another.

And then, they suddenly were back into Naruto's cluttered apartment and Hashirama stared at him, big round tears silently dropping down his face. "This is a nightmare", he choked and for a moment, Madara could easily spot the twelve year old boy at the riverbank, who cried for his dead brother. "All of it."

Not only had he fought… killed… Madara after his love had been the one to realise the full extent of wrongness their village was striding towards, he also had married Uzumaki Mito - because who else could it be Kurama had been referring to- either after or before that and he didn't know which was worse.

He had betrayed everything.

The unwavering trust Madara gifted him with, his lover's faith in him, everything had been teared down to shreds by him.

He didn't blame Mito. If he as the Hokage had asked her to be his bride, it hadn't been politically possible for her to decline.

"I did ruin it", he whispered, voice chokes with tears. "I didn't listen to you. I ruined you, us, everything, all of Konoha-" "Hashirama." He looked up, meeting Madara's gaze. His fine brows were tightly knitted and Hashirama realised that this was it. The last, the ultimate betrayal even Madara wouldn't be able to forgive, the one that would ultimately tear them apart because not even Madara could- "I think it was my fault."

And just like that, Hashirama felt his jaw go slack. "What?"

Madara's lips were thinned into an unhappy line, his face deeply troubled. "The Uchiha have always been particularly prone to madness." His frown deepened even further. "I have felt it, already… when Ikutaru died in my arms, I… I wasn't too far from falling into that abyss, myself. Izuna was the one who saved me; we grew even closer than we already were and while I never forgot, I… I had that goal, that one purpose to keep him safe. But I…" Hashirama could see how he willed himself to keep going as soon as he opened his own

mouth to interfere. “I must have succumbed to that madness, at some point. I don’t know when or how, but it’s the only explanation. Hashirama, of all those things you’re capable of… betrayal has never been one of them. You killed me to protect others when I-” *“That is no excuse!”*

He hadn’t meant to yell, had rarely ever done so before, but how was he supposed to bear the thought Madara considered *himself* the guilty one? “The Yamanaka could have helped! They were the first clan to join Konoha, it would have been their-” “They weren’t.”

In perfect synch, both of their heads snapped up, facing Sai, who awkwardly stood next to a still unconscious Naruto. To his shame, he started fidgeting under their equally piercing gazes. “Shin told me”, he explained, starting to shift his weight back and forth, for some reason not quite able to stop. It had been in a new book, a smuggled one of course, on the history of Konohagakure and Sai had gotten it for him. It even had a copy of the first joining-contract after the village had been founded. “The first joining clan were the Hyuuga.” Only after that came the Yamanaka. He didn’t remember the rest but he was certain of these two because he had discussed with Shin how the third Hokage hadn’t been of either two clans.

The Shoudaime shook his head, momentarily distracted from his mental breakdown. “The Hyuuga didn’t join at all, at least not yet. Not after-” “The history records!” Hashirama looked up, feeling dazzled. “What?”

“The history records”, Madara repeated, his tone more urging, by now. “They have to be kept in the tower; we need to check them!” A quick flash of chakra told him Tsunade was in the Hokage’s office and he slammed open the window hard enough to crack the class, running off at top-speed. Without caring about anything else -it was an ever-continuous pathetic display- the Shoudaime ran after him, leaving Sai behind. He probably should tell Shin about all that had happened today. His brother could get too excited on some topics (even though he always took great care to keep it secret) and for whatever reason, history was one of them.

Next to him on the chafed floor, the jinchuuriki groaned. “What… happened?”

“You owe me two hundred Ryo.”

Not bothering with the door, Madara smashed the window with a harshly thrown kunai, making his way straight to the office. In front of the huge and overloaded desk, three unknown shinobi were discussing something, immediately drawing weapons at his unbidden appearance. One of them gasped. “You are-” “I don’t have time for you”, the Uchiha snapped, not even caring to catch the already unconscious bodies as they dropped to the ground, his still spinning Sharingan re-focussing on Tsunade, who stood behind her desk, the ever-present Shizune behind her, looking rather terrified, clutching the pig she was carrying again for some reason against her chest and tightly pressing her eyes shut. If he had been any less focussed on the task at hand, he would have felt bad; the women might be weak but she had been generous towards him.

But because he was a man on a mission, he didn’t.

“Where are the history archives?”

Before Tsunade was able to answer, Hashirama bolted through the ruined window, stopping in an awkward skid as he tried to avoid stepping on the unconscious shinobi on the floor. “Madara!”

The Uchiha barely turned his head. “Good, you’re here. You can help with the contracts; if you’ve signed them you should be able to-” “Don’t you want to tell me what this is about, first?”

It rarely happened, but Madara’s behaviour had him completely at a loss… and even more so considering the utterly devesting information they had only just been forced to process! Madara should scream, he should yell, he should tell Hashirama to never touch him again, should curse him tenfold and unleash the fire of a thousand raging suns on him.

He shouldn’t just blink at him and frown.

“Tsunade.” Even while addressing her, his attention didn’t waver from Hashirama’s face, searching for some kind of realisation Hashirama apparently should have. “After the Uchiha and Senju founded it, which clan was the first one to join the village?”

Tsunade blinked, taken aback by the question. “I’m not sure.”

“The Hyuuga!” Finally daring to open her eyes again, Shizune was the one to answer. “It’s the only original contract still in the archives, most of them got destroyed during the-” She interrupted herself forcefully, before repeating: “The Hyuuga.” Which was one of the reasons they had such great influence in the village until today. Most people thought it hailed in their great number but actually, it was the fact they were the first ones to join after the village’s foundation that had allowed them to become as influential.

Hashirama frowned. “The Hyuuga didn’t even join Konoha at all”, he argued. “Not after the clan-head gathering refused their consent as long as the sealing-practise hasn’t been forfeited.”

“And even if that hadn’t been issued, they still wouldn’t have been the first clan to ally with us. The Yamanaka have been”, Madara added, looking at Hashirama with some kind of expectation that had the Shoudaime fidgeting. “Uhm…”

Madara couldn’t help but roll his eyes, feeling a strange mix of affection and irritation bubble up inside him.

“If the Hyuuga really were the first clan who joined this village, this means this Konoha’s past does not equal ours! And that would mean whatever happened here might not decide anything to *our*-” He didn’t get to conclude because finally, Hashirama had managed to put two and two together -or in his defence, it might have even been six and six; the matter *was* a little tricky, after all. A warm mouth crashed on his own, its hot tongue wasting no time to forcefully slip in his mouth. He felt Hashirama’s arms wrap around him, his broad palms pressing him even closer, forcing him to stand on his toes in order to avoid being lifted up and losing whatever shred of dignity he might still have stored somewhere.

Nearly against his will, his own arms moved, wrapping around Hashirama's shoulders and he felt the Shoudaime's arms tighten even further, one hand tangling in his hair, as his kiss got even more heated, nearly frantic, and Madara could feel tears dropping from Hashirama's cheeks when he finally leaned back, panting for breath, their mixed salvia cooling on his lips.

Hashirama lifted one of his hands, carefully stroking back the same strand of stubborn hair that always insisted in getting in the way, and when they kissed again, it was tender, full of sweet affection. Hashirama caressed his lower-lip with the pad of his tanned thumb after they parted, still keeping close, eagerly meeting Madara's red, swirling eyes.

Behind them, someone roughly cleared her throat and Madara blinked owlishly, before managing to shift his attention back to Tsunade, who kept it together far better than Shizune next to her, whose pale cheeks were beet-red by now, even though she faced everything in the room but them.

It probably didn't help Hashirama refused to let go, instead merely adjusting his hold somewhat for proper movement. "I would say sorry, but I am not", he not-apologised and despite himself, Madara chuckled. "Moron."

Hashirama looked down to him, his face the ultimate display of tender affection and love. "For you always", he promised and Madara playfully shoved his head away, feeling a blush creeping up his cheeks. "My guess is only that, though", he then cautioned. "We need further proof, and for that we have to check the documents. And even if we find it, I don't have the slightest idea what it means for us."

Hashirama released a shuddering breath. "It means we'll do things right", he said. "Better. It means our story isn't set in stone, we can still change it. We have seen it, here… The good results… and the bad. We'll-" One of the downed shinobi at their feet groaned and finally, Madara's attention shifted and he took a step away, making Hashirama's arms droop emptily.

"Sorry about that", the Uchiha apologised half-hearted. "Stay down, though."

And with that, the man's head dropped to the floor again, but at least this time Madara used his foot to cushion the impact. Then, he turned towards the current Kage. "If the Hyuuga were the first clan joining after the founders, it would mean an important difference to our own history", he explained again. "We need to check all historical documents for differences, up until Konoha's battle against Kumogakure and the Uzumaki." That was the last event they could compare, everything after that wouldn't help anymore… or even worse, might influence them in a wrong way, somehow.

Tsunade felt her face go slack in shock. "There was a battle against the Uzumaki-clan?"

Madara blinked.

This had just become far more difficult than anticipated.

“This one differs”, Hashirama noticed. They were sitting on a perfectly clean white table -the only one in the entire room- and between him and Hashirama a small pile of documents was waiting to be read. Madara pulled the current paper closer.

“It’s correct”, the Uchiha argued. “You did defeat me in battle prior to the village-foundation.”

“You had mucus clogging your lungs, another starting case of pneumonia and fainted after nearly three hours of battle due to oxygen-shortage.” *Defeated Uchiha Madara in battle*, as the paper claimed, was rather different from that.

“Are the medical issues lingering?”

Both of them looked up. In front of them, on the other side of the table (which had exactly four seats, how convenient) Tsunade and Shizune had taken seats after they had gathered the historical documents that traced down to the first few years after the village’s foundation. They were alarmingly few, even though this entire archive was in the underground part of the Hokage-tower, protected by an impressive number of seals.

Tsunade had been the one to ask and in his stead, Hashirama nodded. “Until today, he has chronic lung-disfunctions”, he answered. “The fluid-exchange is fragmentary, causing body mucus to settle in his lungs. He told me of severe cases of pneumonia; I treated the last one myself and burned the infection to stop the spreading.”

Both women inhaled sharply, Shizune’s face even more appalled than his grand-daughter’s (was is even correct anymore? He… had come to like it, somehow). “Chakra-burning causes un-revisable consequences”, she argued, seeming horrified at the mere thought. Hashirama shrugged, a little helplessly. “I didn’t have a choice”, he answered. “His state had worsened considerable over-night and his body was too weakened to fight off a full fit of pneumonia. The lower-left lung is his weak-point; it’s scared over several times already. I wasn’t able to save roughly two square-inches of surface; I had to burn the entire tissue and knit the edges together again.”

“Hurt as hell”, Madara grumbled, dragging the abandoned documents closer towards himself, recognising a lost cause when he saw one. Hashirama wouldn’t look at these for however long this conversation took.

“You performed an operation that dire without sedating you patient?! How could you even-”
“Shizune.” Tsunade’s interruption made her look up. Despite having been silent so far, the legendary medic-nin had been utterly attentive to the conversation. And then the shoe dropped -and so did her mouth. “You didn’t have MBS-measures yet”, Shizune whispered and Hashirama blinked, puzzled. “What?”

“Medical Breathing Stabilisation”, Tsunade supplied, followed by Shizune’s explanation: “A certain set of jutsu allowing the caster to control their patient’s lung functions. It would have allowed you to take over Madara…san’s breathing-processes during the operation. Tsunade-hime invented it! She is a medical enigma, the greatest medic-nin in history! Well… other than you, Shoudaime-sama.” Neither confirming, nor denying, Tsunade spoke up again. “In

your case, I probably would have shut down the left pleura and lower lobe to work on-" Again, Hashirama blinked. "The what?"

For another moment, the two of them stared at him and finally, Tsunade couldn't help but smile. "The lower parts of the lung, grand-father. I would have taken over Madara-san's lung-functions and shut down that part to work on it while keeping the general lung-functions up."

Madara closed a folder and put it aside to grab a new one, deciding he very much preferred breathing on his own no matter the pain, thank you very much.

"What are his specific symptoms?", Tsunade asked and Madara rolled his eyes. Like father, like (grand-)daughter, he thought, pulling out the new papers. Konoha's layout shortly after the foundation. Hashirama's house was marked and he frowned at the missing giant garden-area behind it.

"The mis-lead processes cause mucus to gather in his lungs. In his younger years, he apparently was able to cough most of them up, but by the time we founded Konohagakure, he had grown unable to", Hashirama explained. "He's been prone to pneumonia, but we have a good grip of that because I water down the gathered mucus once a week, having him cough it up and clean his lungs. I estimate he has around eighty-five percent fully working lung-capacity", both, Tsunade and Shizune frowned at that, "But interestingly, his system had adapted quite amazingly to the shortcomings. He was able to battle me with maybe half of his current lung-function during our last fight."

"Does he have bodyweight-issues?", Tsunade asked and Madara suppressed a groan when Hashirama nodded enthusiastically. "When I started treating him, he was malnourished", he confirmed. "Don't get me wrong, food was short for all of us, but… I don't think he had much more than fifty kilograms that point, maybe fifty-two." The sole fact Madara didn't deny confirmed he was right. "He has gained, but he's still underweight and I doubt we're going to get much better." Hashirama grinned. "Last week I got inarizushi from the vendor and only stopped feeding him when he started stabbing my face with the chop-sticks."

"You're a pest", the Uchiha confirmed, coughing twice due to the room's artificial air, before he realised his faux-pas, as three pairs of medic-eyes immediately focussed on him. "Don't even think about it."

"But Madara-"

"No."

"This might be the only opportunity!"

"Do you want me to stab you again?"

Hashirama sighed, turning back to the two others. "He's a difficult patient", he offered and somehow, Tsunade found herself smiling at that. "I can see that."

"Madara."

The Uchiha looked up again, meeting the pleading face of his lover. “Do I have to-” *“Please.”* If they passed up on this opportunity, Hashirama would always hold it against himself! If there was a way to heal Madara, this was the only opportunity they might have to find it!

For a moment, Madara kept quiet. Then, he exhaled. Deeply. “Fine.”

Hashirama beamed at him and when the Uchiha got up from his chair, so did he. Two snaps, then his red armour clanked to the ground and he stepped out of it, dressed in a deep purple mantle because unlike Hashirama, his fashion-sense was boring like that. “Once”, he cautioned.

In front of him, Tsunade got up from her chair while Shizune scrambled to do the same.

“Betray my trust and Hashirama will tear down this village.” It wasn’t a threat, merely a statement, before he continued, as though he hadn’t just predicted their annihilation. “Do you prefer for me to sit or stand?” Laying down wasn’t an option, not with anyone but Hashirama.

“Sitting would be preferable”, Tsunade answered and Madara pulled forth his chair again, stepping over his armour, and took a seat. Shizune couldn’t help but swallow. This was… This was without a doubt the most important exam she would ever witness in her life! There were no records on Uchiha Madara’s health, corpse or general constitution other than claiming him the only shinobi Lord First had to go all out in battle with. “Please unfold your arms”, Tsunade asked and the last Uchiha patriarch listened, letting his arms fall to his side. Her palms lit with medical chakra but before she could start, the raven huffed. “Are you dead meat?”, he asked Shizune, who stood two steps away. “Get working, I won’t do this again.”

She felt her jaw going slack. “But… I…” Hadn’t expected to participate. When he lifted an eyebrow, she hesitatingly covered her hands in chakra, as well, stepping closer. She could do this! This was just another examination, she had done hundreds, thousands, by now! (Maybe if she told it to herself a few more times, she’d actually believe it).

“We will start now”, Tsunade announced, carefully lowering both palms onto the Uchiha’s chest, while Shizune did the same on his shoulders -and immediately flinched back, but forced herself to keep her hands steady. *So much* chakra. Uchiha had been known for their fire affinity but his entire chakra-systems seemed to burn, molten flames compressed a thousand times! She could hardly detect anything other than that, her whole focus captured by the *amount*. And his eyes. His eyes. She had even treated a few Uchiha, back then, but nothing came close to *this*! His chakra-pathways were river-beds and even though his Sharingan were disactivated for the time being, she could only imagine the sheer amount of chakra they were able to conduct! It was massive enough to drain ordinary reserves in minutes, not hours!

And then-

She screamed, falling on her butt in a rather undignified manner when suddenly, there was chakra *everywhere*. The pathways were flooded as though river-gates had been opened, amounts she had never considered even possible flowing through them right to his eye-balls

and she could nearly feel the neurons in his brain firing information at a speed she had never before witnessed.

When she looked up, a pair of swirling red eyes watched her with a pattern that wasn't the Sharingan. He snickered, doubtlessly amused by her reaction. "Sorry about that." He seemed nearly… mischievous. It had been on purpose, Shizune realised… and above all, he didn't seem strained in the slightest with the masses of chakra he spent momentarily! How was so much chakra even able to fit within his physique!

Behind her, the Shoudaime laughed, too, offering her a hand to get up. "Don't be a twat, love", he chuckled and Madara rolled those red, strangely patterned eyes of his, before the colour retreated, leaving behind his pitch-black irises.

Unlike her, Tsunade hadn't interrupted her examination during his little stunt and only now dropped her palms. "You are slightly underweight but not alarmingly so", she confirmed both of their expectations. "Your jejunum -that's the second-largest part of your small intestine- is mis-functioning", she explained further and ironically, Hashirama was far more interested in her diagnosis than Madara himself. "The absorption-processes are too slow, meaning the food has already passed the tract before specific kinds of nutrition could be fully absorbed -as far as I can tell by now, in your case that mostly refers to nutrition-fats, even though I can't rule out others. Your spleen is slightly effected, which weakens your immune system. The biggest issue are your lung-functions. The fluid-exchange is fundamentally impacted. Your body-cells barely re-absorb water by osmosis, causing it to clog to the mucus grand-father has already described, which eventually will cause infections and ultimately, lung-failure."

She looked up. "Cystic fibrosis is un-curable, but as long as the symptoms are regularly treated, the general life-expectation shouldn't be harshly affected in your case. Normally, I would advise against an active shinobi career or at least any missions above B-rang, but in this case I redeem my opinion."

Chapter End Notes

The Hyuuga were so quick to join bc when they heard Hashirama defeated one dou-jutsu leader, they thought theirs would be the next btw.
And because we don't know who actually was the first joining clan, I didn't even need to struggle with canon-stuff. Score.

Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

In which Madara wishes they had gotten an instruction manual for Six Paths Powers.
Or rather, he had. Hashirama wouldn't have read it, anyhow.

Chapter Notes

This chapter took six weeks and I'm SO sorry!
I'm writing my final thesis für university and after staring at my laptop all day, I just couldn't concentrate on doing typing even more, no matter how much I love to...

Utterly uninterested.

That was the only proper way to describe Uchiha Madara's attitude, while Tsunade and Shoudaime-sama discussed the results of the recent medical exam. Right after it, he had merely switched the chair back into its place and re-started reading the few files the archive had to offer from the time right after the village's creation, his armour set aside. Not a single shred of interest for the discussion around his condition that, without proper treatment, would ultimately be lethal.

Shoudaime-sama nodded enthusiastically. "The symptoms usually get worse in humid weather! Don't they, love?"

The last Uchiha patriarch didn't even look up as he turned a page. "Yes, Hashirama, and you know that better than me."

Tsunade-hime frowned. "Is he always this… unresponsive to treatment?"

The Shoudaime laughed, a bright sound in the usually so silent archive. "Oh, he isn't", he grinned and Shizune exhaled in relief. That was something to work with, at least. Maybe after they- "He's worse." Wait, what? "Just be glad he didn't yell yet… Or even worse, started stabbing."

Uchiha Madara once more didn't look up, when he answered: "That only happened twice. You had it coming."

Lord First grinned. "Whatever you say, love."

Shizune didn't have any words and it didn't help when the Uchiha closed his current folder and grabbed another one with slender, long fingers, flipping it open without gracing anyone with a glance. It was- she couldn't- "The two best medical shinobi in history want to help you and you don't even *care*?!"

Calmy, Uchiha Madara finished the current paragraph before raising his head, his piercing gaze making her flinch. "I let two foreign shinobi examine me for him. There's little more I can do; keeping me alive outside the battlefield is entirely Hashirama's responsibility."

The Shoudaime had the gall to actually whine at that. "Don't roll that off onto me; I do what I can but you're not helping your case", he protested, turning back to Tsunade. "He has self-destruction tendencies", he explained as though it should be obvious and at that, the Uchiha finally faced him again, eye twitching. "That might explain why I bear with you!"

Shoudaime-sama stared at him and Shizune felt her jaw going slack up the umpteenth time at the- "You're a meanie", Lord First sniffed - *sniffed*!-, lower lip sticking out in a pout and the Uchiha's twitch got even worse, as he gave back: "Did I get that right, you want to read instead, while I chat?"

Lord First rose his hands in surrender, the pout gone in an instant, now laughing sheepishly. The Uchiha huffed. "Didn't think so."

And finally, the pieces clicked and Shizune understood. The Shoudaime would much rather debate about the current medical topics instead of working through the papers, so the Uchiha took that onto himself as to allow Shoudaime-sama the time to do so!

Lord First laughed sheepishly, scratching his head. "Called me out", he confessed and Shizune felt her cheeks grow warm upon the realisation that she had said it aloud. A tender smile slotted onto the Shoudaime's features. "He won't show it and he certainly doesn't want you to know, but I'll tell you a secret." The small smile got a little wider but no less soft. "Madara is a fundamentally kind man."

Considering he had killed Danzō-sama merely a day after his arrival and floored a dozen Shinobi in the meantime, Shizune wasn't too certain about that. While he might not have been outright hostile towards them… "It might have been easier if Uchiha-sama didn't right out omit Tsunade-hime's order about moving around the village and-" Hearty laughter interrupted her musings and both, Tsunade and herself looked up, facing Lord First who laughed in honest mirth, even wiping a tear from his eye. "That was…", his own chuckle interrupted him, "That was a good one! Let me tell you something. A secret, if you so will!" His grin got wider again. "The number of orders I have ever dared giving Madara either before or after taking on my position as Hokage is zero." "As a shinobi of Konoha it is his duty to do follow your lead", Tsunade fiercely disagreed, crossing her arms. No matter who Uchiha Madara thought he was -no matter who he in fact was- that duty to was absolute!

However; her grandfather merely smiled at her with an expression telling her she was horrifyingly naïve to believe such. "And he would follow", he conceded. Probably. Maybe. "And right after, he would cut my hamstrings and put me on abstinence for at least a month." His smile got wider, until he grinned at her again. "The only reason he downed those first

Anbu is because they ordered him to cease. Had you just nicely asked him to, he probably wouldn't have."

"Still would", the Uchiha grumbled, setting aside the current folder and taking the next -and last- one. "Stupid bunch of people. Who did they even think they were?"

The Shoudaime sighed, obviously not hearing this for the first time. "I already told you, it's not their fault. They had their orders-" "Which your granddaughter gave, so you're not helping your own case, Hashirama", the Uchiha hissed, prickly like an annoyed cat.

The Shoudaime grinned again, a little crocked perhaps, and lifted a shoulder in an unsurprised shrug, facing his granddaughter. "See?", he offered. It was true; Madara could be the most wonderful, compliant man… until anyone, including his Hokage, even so much as attempted to order him, no matter how reasonable. "It doesn't even matter whether he agrees, or not", Hashirama added. "You could offer him world-peace on a silver platter and as soon as you'd order him to open it, he would just shove it down your throat." For some reason, the Shoudaime seemed to consider it funny, even though Shizune had absolutely no idea how a rogue Shinobi of this calibre could be considered entertaining…

"Stop exaggerating", the Uchiha ordered (*hah!*), finally closing the last folder to partake in the conversation again. "Most of this is bullshit but remind me to double-check that Hyuuga-pack, should they ever try to move in again."

"Uchiha-san."

Carefully re-ordering the documents again, Madara looked up. "What is it?" He wasn't even hostile, Shizune noted as he turned towards Tsunade, neither necessarily rude. He merely just omitted every rule of politeness, no matter whom he was talking to, cutting straight to the core without caring about the bridges he might burn in the process.

"You didn't know of his apparently stolen eyes before seeking him out, so that was not your cause. What reason did you have, to kill Shimura Danzō?"

The Uchiha's cutting, frighteningly intelligent eyes seemed to pierce Tsunade, as he contempered an answer and even though Hashirama did know some extends, he was aware Madara hadn't told him everything, least of all due to missing time. He had never questioned his lover, though. If Madara went to such lengths, it must have been truly dire.

Madara stapled his slender fingers on the table, obviously considering the question for a moment. While the eye-theft had been the reason for his ultimate act of revenge, that hadn't been why he had sought the Shimura out in the first place, the current Kage was right about that.

Unlike her former student, Tsunade noticed the swirling Sharingan but nevertheless wasn't able to evade it, as the Uchiha was much too fast for any of them. She had gotten too comfortable, falling prey to it was her own fault; he was the single most powerful rogue shinobi in history, she should have- *"Not good enough!"* She couldn't help but flinch. *"You will not disgrace the village. Again!"*

The pain in her arms was strong enough to force them to give out, making her crash onto the floor, blood seeping out from… somewhere.

Except it didn't hurt.

Except it wasn't her.

She sucked in a sharp breath as she realised what was happening. A memory. This was a memory! And considering the voice belonged to Shimura Danzō, it obviously wasn't Uchiha Madara's memory, either.

No happiness, no sadness, merely obedience. He had drawn a butterfly yesterday, its wing-pattern had seemed unusual. Someone had told Danzō-sama… he had been ordered to burn the portrait alongside the rest of his artbook, no matter his jutsu were based on drawing and obeyed without hesitation. "There is no reason for anything besides duty!" He had watched as his work burned, his eyes dry, his hands steady. "I beg for forgiveness, Danzō-sama." "You will beg in vain, then."

A few months later, one of them had died, fallen to a rogue nin.

He hadn't cried. None of them did. Emotions were a hindrance. What mattered was only the protection of the village. If told to, they would die in droves.

He wouldn't even have had a name to sign his art with, anyway. Root agents weren't needed to be named, names were just another hindrance. No names, no age. It was all immaterial. He didn't matter. He didn't exist outside of Root.

When three of them went to pass the final test, only one returned.

He didn't miss the others. Loss was a hindrance. They weren't allowed to form personal bounds, anyway.

Affection was a hindrance.

There was no him, there was nothing that was him, there was no life that mattered. The mission was everything, when it came down to it, he himself was worthless. He wasn't Sai, Sai was just another label that would be replaced whenever necessary. His date of birth didn't matter either, maybe ten years ago, maybe eleven, maybe more, maybe less. He would die as soon as the need arose.

There was only the mission.

There was only Root.

With a gasp, Tsunade returned to reality, when the jutsu broke. Not her own doing though, she was well aware genjutsu cast with the Sharingan were nearly impossible to break for no-specialists.

“My God”, Shizune quietly wailed next to her, “I never… I didn’t…”

“I… understand.” Tsunade’s voice was unusually quiet and Madara nodded calmly. “Do not be mistaken”, he said mildly. “I would have killed him either way.”

“Danzō-sama was renowned for his devotion to village protection”, Tsunade explained. “I didn’t expect...”

Next to them, something snarled, then dripped and when Madara turned, he saw abhorrent snarling flowers, their long teeth dripping venom onto the ground -or rather acid, considering the way the globs melted through the floor. The whole wall was covered, even more plants rising from the ground, their teeth seeking to tear apart flesh, to mutilate, to *kill and devore*.

Hashirama stood perfectly still next to him, not a single hair moving, as though hammered from stone and with eery calm, Madara stood and made his way to the other side of the table, right between the two women. In a breath, midnight-blue chakra surrounded him, as his armoured Susano’o wrapped around them and afterwards closed off the rest of the archive with an armoured arm.

The Shoudaime’s entire body started seeping violent chakra as giant, abhorrent plants -they had lost the right to be called flowers- erupted everywhere, snarling at them, their teeth digging into the Susano’o’s fingers, tearing and wrenching in rage. The floor cracked underneath the Shoudaime’s feet, unable to withstand the materialised forced of his rage.

And then, the God of Shinobi roared in fury and his punch would have levelled the entire archive, hadn’t it been for the Susano’o containing the shockwaves. “You shouldn’t have killed him”, he bellowed. “Why did you kill him? *Death was too good for him!*”

Even more vicious than before, the mutilated plants started ripping on the Susano’o’s armour, even though it remained ungiving.

“I wished to spare you the knowledge of our failure”, Madara simply answered, obviously unfazed by the sheer amount of destructive rage that had Shizune cowering behind him in a fear she would never be embarrassed about.

The Kami no Shinobi *howled*, yet whether it was fury or pain neither of them knew. Maybe it was both. “My failure”, he then cried. “Mine alone. Because I killed you! You knew, you saw, and I had the *gall* to doubt you, to fight you, to *kill* you, when you had been right all along!” His lips thinned into a line caved out of stone. “This entire village is a failure.”

Eyes far too wide, her whole frame shivering, Shizune stared at the First Hokage, his umber eyes now golden in fury, his gentle face no longer that of a loving God but a Behemoth instead. He would kill them, he would annihilate them all, everything in his path and there was nothing, not a single thing, any of them could do about it.

“This is not our village, Hashirama.”

How could he stay calm, how wasn’t he shivering in fear in the face of this Behemoth, this bringer of ends?

“This is where we failed and by what insight I gained, failure was imminent right from the start. Ours won’t. Because we are stronger that our counterparts. We are better.” Even though neither, the acid chakra, the drivelling plants, nor the Shoudaime’s rage had at least somehow relented, his Susano’o retreated, as the Uchiha stepped forth. “There is nothing we can do for this failed version of Konohagakure. But there is everything we can do for ours.” He caressed the Shoudaime’s face, effortlessly passing the raging waves of chakra.

A moment went by, before the Shoudaime closed his eyes, his shoulders still tense, before he covered the raven’s hand with his own, larger one. The tears that dripped down his cheeks were honest with grief and suddenly, Madara couldn’t wait to get away from this twisted reality. “I will not fail you”, he whispered. “I will never fail you. If you choose to leave the village behind, I will follow you to the edge of the world… And even then, I will make sure none of his ever happens. I will protect our dream, I will protect our village.” His second hand rose, cupping the Uchiha’s pale face in a gesture that seemed nearly grotesque in comprehension to the destruction he had caused mere moments before. “And I will protect *you*.”

A sudden spike of chakra had Madara look up and he blinked, when he noticed the nine perfectly round orbs floating behind the Senju’s back, each one humming with energy.

They had surfaced at the beginning of the battle against the united force of Uzumaki and Kumogakure shinobi, last time. Having them re-emerge this soon after couldn’t be pure luck.

“Hashirama.”

Still utterly devasted -a fast contrast from his rage but at least less destructive- the Shoudaime looked at him. “I don’t know where it started going wrong, here, but I swear I will-” “Hashirama.” That finally made him shut up, still staring at Madara out of his large eyes, full of emotion. “Your back”, the raven said and Hashirama blinked, obviously being caught off-footed by the switch of topics. “My… what?”

Madara rolled his eyes; how could his lover be the most intuitive person he had ever met and at the same time, the slowest? “Your back”, he repeated. “The orbs returned.”

Thankfully distracted from his emotional fallout, Hashirama blinked again, before with a metallic clunk, one of the orbs levitated forwards, as if to prove the Shoudaime that yes, it indeed existed. “But… why?”

Madara crossed his arms. “When we first exited the grave, my eyes and your orbs were gone. They returned during the battle. This is the only time-” “When the Hyuuga negotiated”, Hashirama cut in. “That was even before, but it only affected you.”

Truth to be told, Madara probably would have forgotten, had he not been reminded. “There has to be a reason they resurface! It happened too often to be coincidence!”

Hashirama nodded, carefully circling the orbs behind his back, as to avoid wracking havoc with them. Despite their size, he had already experienced their destructive potential.

Madara tiled his head, considering. “When I talked to the Hyuuga”, Or rather, yelled at him, “I was pissed beyond reason; the idea alone of including their sealing-practise into Konoha… and even worse, if you would hear about it too late, after they already moved in, you wouldn’t have been able to live with the guilt… Then when the battle started, we didn’t even have time to consider what happened. We had to protect-” He stopped, onyx eyes widening, as he finally realised the obvious. “It’s protection, Hashirama!”

Patiently, the Shoudaime waited. Madara was in a deductive rage, better to let him be and finish his whirling trains of thought. Madara had always been the smarter one of the two of them and if he was honest, he sometimes wondered what this brilliant man even wanted from someone like Hashirama, who might have a particular kind of emotional instinct but overall, was no way near his lover’s range when it came to pure intelligence. He had once even talked to Tobirama about it, but that hadn’t really helped since his little brother was smarter than himself, too.

“It makes perfect sense!”

Hashirama sighed. “What exactly makes sense, love?”

“Don’t you realise?” No, no he really didn’t. He didn’t have to wait long though, since Madara immediately continued without allowing him to confirm or deny. “Matatabi told us Ashura and Indra fought each other over some quarrel of inheritance. And since the others pretty much said the same, we can consider that information legit. Before he… left, the Sage told us, he would do -and I quote- ‘Whatever is within my power, to allow your peace to grow and nurture’. I always assumed he meant the village. But he didn’t! He meant *us*, Hashirama! You and me! His sons battled to death over leadership, just as the Hashirama and Madara in this history did. The Sage didn’t give us… whatever this is”, He pointed at the orbs, “To protect the village. They only ever woke when we sought to protect *each other*!”

The Shoudaime was speechless for a moment, simply staring at the raven in front of him, his deep wonderful eyes staring straight into his soul. “I can’t wait to return home with you”, he then breathed, easing a strand of hair out of the raven’s face.

Madara smiled; a little thing but so unbearably precious it made Hashirama’s heart ache. “A day or two more to refill our chakra resources, then we’ll be able to work on it.”

Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

The future generation always surpasses the last one.
That means Tsunade has long since surpassed Hashirama at losing in card-games.

Chapter Notes

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Tsunade?"

She looked up to him from where they made their way out of the basements back to her office. "Yes?" It was strange, talking to this man who was in so many ways her beloved grandfather and yet he was not in just as many… She missed him, but… Her gaze flicked to the Uchiha patriarch who walked behind him, his armour re-donned. The orbs had disappeared merely minutes after having been formed, which Hashirama had seemed grateful about. Were she a civilian, she wouldn't have known that the Uchiha walking behind him implied leaving his own back vulnerable for attack while protecting the Shoudaime's in front of him.

As it was, she knew better.

Her grandfather -her true one, not this version of him, no matter how similar they were- had never been quite as… happy. He had been a gentle man, always smiling and cheerful. But now, she was aware he had entirely lacked the gentle smile he offered Uchiha Madara, the tender gaze he watched him with, as though he was looking at something so precious nothing else could compare, able to shatter any moment.

Her grandfather had been happy. But… She lowered her head ever so slightly.

Had he been content?

What had happened between him and Uchiha Madara that had forced her grandfather to kill him?

"Where did you get the pig?" The Shoudaime's question made her focus re-shift to him and she blinked. "Ton-Ton? He's-" "Don't tell him."

She stopped in her tracks, both metaphorical and physical, and frowned at the Uchiha patriarch who had cut her off without hesitation. “He is not getting a pig.”

“Wha-” Hashirama pouted, staring at him. “You have an entire squad of falcons!”

“And they prefer living outside after you nearly crashed them in their own aviary.” They resumed walking again, he could already see the exit that lead right into the office. He didn’t question why there was one; if Tobirama had really been Hokage at some point, of course there was one. “You’re not getting a pet, least of all one you’ll try to smuggle to bed within a week. Besides, your entire house is filled with plants; I stumbled over a branch on my way from the kitchen and spilled my tea three days ago.” Or rather… Three days and a few decades ago?

“And people still think I’m the one in charge”, the Shoudaime sulked, making Madara laugh loudly and grin nearly boyishly. “Not even Tobirama thinks that.”

Hashirama spluttered. “Of course he doesn’t, he’s my brother! But the rest-” “There you are!”

The four of them stopped and Hashirama smiled. “Sai-kun. It’s good to see you.”

Sai of course didn’t show whether he shared the sentiment. Instead, he accusingly pointed at the blonde boy next to him. “He won’t pay, even though he lost the bet!” Not much was missing and he would have stomped his foot. At least, someone had taken care of the downed shinobi, Madara noted, and taken them out of the office.

“I already told you, I can’t”, Naruto whined. “I really thought the tall one would win; he was so much bigger, I wanted to use the money to invite you to a bowl of Ramen!”

“We shook hands, you said that settles the bet! It’s not my fault you don’t have any money”, Sai growled.

“I’m sorry, how was I supposed to know-” The boy stopped and blinked. “Hey, you look like those statues; the ones right outside the village! Is this some kind of joke?”

Hashirama blinked back just as dumbly. “There’s statues of us?”

“You are not going to make statues of us.”

“But… It’s a wonderful idea”, Hashirama pouted, making the Uchiha roll his eyes at him. “You didn’t manage to get my face on the mountain, so now you want a statue.” “It’s a beautiful face”, the Shoudaime argued, making Madara huff. “Shut it.”

“Uhm.” Squinting, Naruto stared at them, breaking their scruffle. “Who exactly are you people?”

Sai stared are him. “Are you stupid?”, he asked, the usually rhetorical question being absolutely serious. Within a blink, Madara changed their appearance with a simple gen-jutsu, merely an overlay of the figures they both had used the move within the village earlier.

“It’s you two! You were weird!”, Naruto finally realised, making Hashirama slump. “He thinks we’re weird”, he sulked, and Madara rolled his eyes. “You *are* weird”, he snipped, letting the genjutsu slip away again. Then, he slightly turned towards Tsunade. “I want those two in a team”, he ordered, making Shizune splutter while Tsunade frowned. “Naruto already is resigned to Team 7, the teams consist-” “I don’t care”, the Uchiha patriarch cut in and while his rudeness had the two women shut up in order to not trigger his wrath -which both were very aware, an outright refusal would- Sai had far less qualms to argue. “I don’t need a team and I don’t want to be on a team with him! He’s a scammer!” Not that Sai wasn’t, but this wasn’t what this was about!

“I am not!”, Naruto yelled back. “Blame him!” He pointed at Hashirama. “He’s so much bigger, how was I supposed to know he would be so lame?”

Madara could feel Hashirama sink to the ground in a depressed fit without even turning around.

“You lost! I would’ve used the money to buy that book for Shin, he’s ill again and I don’t think-” Sai cut himself off, before spilling even worse information and this time, it was Hashirama who interfered, his depressed fit passing away instantly at the prospect of people in need. “Shin is your friend?” No reaction. “Your brother”, the Shoudaime guessed again and this time, the black-haired boy shrugged. Sai couldn’t believe how this undignified man somehow made him tell all of his secrets! He didn’t even know why, it just happened, as if Sai was a blabbering idiot -pretty much like that stupid kid next to him!

Hashirama turned to the Hokage. “The village’s budget might be able to handle a book purchase”, he smiled. “And a medical visit at home.” And then he reached out and -Sai spluttered indigently- he reached out and *ruffle his hair* “You are still a child”, he sighed. “You shouldn’t have already forgotten how to smile.” And right after, with a switch that had Sai doubt his mental credibility once more, he beamed at him with a radiating smile. “I think young Naruto will teach you just fine how to be friends.”

“You heard it”, the blond brat crowed. “We’re friends, now! I’ll teach you everything, even if that stupid Sasuke-” *”That’s it”*, Tsunade hollered. “Naruto, tell your Sensei to meet me in the office first thing tomorrow morning, I know you have a training scheduled for this evening on ground eleven. Sai”, She walked to her desk in a poor attempt of controlling her exploding temper and ripped open a drawer, tearing out some papers and hitting them far too harshly with a stamp, “To the reception with you. A medic will accompany you to your apartment to look after your brother. I want you both here first thing tomorrow morning. Off with you. *Off!*” Like a scared cat, Naruto bolted out of the office, whereas Sai hesitated another moment. “I’ll stretch the book-money again”, the Hokage threatened and finally, the boy rushed off, taking the door unlike Naruto.

“I am getting too old for this”, Tsunade growled and Shizune patted her back patronizingly. “You cannot quit, you started only three weeks ago.” “Feels like three decades”, Tsunade growled again. Predictively, Hashirama started to whine on the spot. “See?”, he asked, gesturing at her. “It’s not only me! This work is *hard!*” As though she had forgotten they were still there, Tsunade raised her head, staring at her not-quite grandfather. “Want to have a drink?” Hashirama beamed at her. “Sure!”

Deep in thought, Madara took a sip of his sake. “Never thought I’d meet someone even worse at gambling than Hashirama.”

Cautiously, Shizune peeked at him. He was sipping his sake, a picture of perfect contentment, as he watched Shoudaime-sama stare in disbelief as his cards on the table, which were horrendously bad, but somehow, Tsunade had the worst possible hand in the game.

“Does he gamble often?”, she asked, still cautious, and he huffed into his drink. “Far more than he should with his abyssal bad luck”, the raven answered, downing the last of his sake and throwing the cup at the Shoudaime, who caught it mid-air and refilled, before carefully sliding it back to him and taking a few gulps from the bottle, nearly finishing it. How he had convinced Madara to “have a cup or two, c’mon we can still have a nice evening” was beyond him, but somehow, the stupid Senju had managed. No more than two cups, though, he wouldn’t feel those in his system yet.

Tsunade dealt the cards again and they both picked. Predictably, Hashirama’s were a disaster and he took another deep gulp from the sake-bottle, merely to make a face as it was empty. “*Can* you even get drunk?”, Madara asked in semi interest, still nursing his own cup, and the Shoudaime blinked. “I tried”, he confessed. “After the incident with Mito, when I thought you were leaving me, I had... thirteen? No, it was more, I brought two more, and I tried to drink myself into stupor. I really, really did. Of course, it didn’t work, I just got sad. Had to get up every hour that night to pee”, he muttered and Madara raised an elegant eyebrow. “The incident you forgot your betrothal with Mito or the incident you talked with her about surrogation?”, he asked pointily and didn’t beat an eye when Hashirama started stammering again how he was oh so sorry about it all.

Tsunade frowned. “You were betrothed to my grandmother -I mean, Uzumaki Mito?”, she asked and the Shoudaime nodded. “The better part of my life”, he informed her, making Shizune stare at him in disbelief. How...? “It was arranged when we both were children, as to tighten the bounds between our clans. If I had died prior to the marriage, Tobirama would have taken my place.”

“So… It… Wasn’t an actual marriage?”, Tsunade asked and Hashirama blinked, attempting to follow up. “You mean a love marriage? No, it wasn’t. I only met her once, before. But…” He hesitated, his unfailing emotional instinct kicking in. “I can’t say for your grandfather. Maybe they married out of love, even though such is uncommon for children of clan-leaders.”

Madara frowned. “It is?”, he asked and Hashirama turned to him. “You mean, the Uchiha never married for it?”, he asked and the raven shrugged. “Not that I’m aware of, no. Emotion -love in particular- is far too precious to be nullified like that. Even my father-” He cut himself off, hesitated, and took a deep breath before continuing. “Even my father was an halfway agreeable man before mother died.” He stared into the nothingness for a few moments. “She died in childbed. I believe he blamed us for her death.” His lips pressed together hard enough to turn entirely white. “Hope he rots in hell.” He downed his second cup of sake, wishing for more, entirely ignoring Shizune’s staring. There was nothing left of Uchiha Madara, except for a single statue and the deeply rooted fear whenever his name was

whispered in a hushed voice. She had never thought about it before, but now it saddened her how of this man -even though he might have been different in her Konoha's past- was nothing else left. Even this little knowledge was more than everything else still known about Uchiha Madara.

"I'm sorry", she confessed and the Uchiha patriarch set aside his now empty cup. "Don't be", he simply answered. "He deserved it all." Then, he turned his gaze to Hashirama again. "You win again", he informed him, making the Senju splutter. "What? How do you-" "You have a Five that would normally be worthless because you can't combine it with your shitty cards. But all higher options are out already, including the pairs Tsunade might have been able to trump your single Five with." It was an obvious attempt to change topics and Hashirama shook his head. "You're just as bad as Tobirama", he sighed, setting down his cards on the table. "How's your lungs?"

"Good enough to yell at you", Madara answered mildly and the Shoudaime groaned. "I don't even know why you even-" *"Hiraishin!"*

It was hard to tell which happened first: The call, the wail or the groan. Maybe all at the same time. Doubtlessly though, the most pressing was the black-haired young man clad in an Uchiha-robe who screamed in agony as he fell on his knees, his hands clenching his face, blood seeping from between his fingers.

"Izuna!" Immediate, as though he hadn't moved at all, the Uchiha patriarch was at his side and just a moment later, two wooden clones were shaped behind the Shoudaime's back without him even forming a sign. Shizune had heard about it, rumours said the Nidaime had crafted his famous shadow clones after his older brother's usage of wooden ones. She also couldn't help but notice how the chakra amount he used was enormous in comparison to modern medical nin-jutsu which was specifically channelled to the necessary areas. The Shoudaime instead flooded his patients' entire body with chakra, a technique that would leave medical shinobi drained after treating merely a handful of patients. Or rather, Shizune assumed, *ordinary*medical shinobi.

She took a step forth, willing to help but unknowing whether taking action was advisable right now. Even shinobi from the Leaf often refrained medical help if they could afford doing so, after all. The young man's wails of pain got even more intense.

"Cut…" The Nidaime gasped for breath, supporting himself on the ground with a hand. "Cut off the visual nerves."

And just like that, the young man went silent, taking one last shuddering breath. "Is… Everyone alright?", he asked, carefully lowering his hands and Shizune couldn't help but stare. His entire face was covered with blood, fresh drops still pouring from his eyes, while Madara carefully wiped his face with his sleeve, wetting it with a simple suiton jutsu.

"No", the third man answered in a rough voice, teeth grit. His body convulsed in ways Shizune was entirely certain weren't human as the scars on his skin ripped open, merely to close again moments after. In a jerky movement, he ripped down the mask that covered his face and turned his head aside, to throw up blood and bile. His face was as butchered as the rest of him, the mouth-corners cut and sewn shut again. One of the Shoudaime's wooden

clones was already infusing chakra at his back and the second one was behind the Nidaime, doing the same. Shizune was easily able to tell the signs of severe chakra-shortage on him.

“Your eyes’ chakra-pathways have entirely burned out”, the Shoudaime diagnosed and the black haired man huffed a choked laughter. “Nearly didn’t notice”, he muttered while Madara wiped the last of the blood off, leaving his sleeve ruined. “What happened?”, he asked, obviously not caring about the bloodened cloth, instead inspecting the other man’s eyes. “Ask Super-Brain over there… I’m not really up for explanation, Aniki.”

“You had a brother?!” Oh, fuck, why couldn’t she just keep her damned mouth shut?! One day it was going to get her killed and somehow, today apparently had a lot of potential for that!

“I had four brothers”, the Uchiha patriarch corrected Shizune in a strangely mild tone. “Now I only have one.”

“I will be able to renew the chakra-pathways”, the Shoudaime cut in. “But… I’m afraid leaving your eyes in their sockets is an additional risk for complications on your retina. With your consent, I would remove each eye to treat the chakra-pathways separately, before re-inserting.”

Shizune and the current Hokage couldn’t help but share a short glance. Uchiha -for good reasons- had been incredibly territorial with their eyes and a non-clan healer rarely had had the possibility to examine them, even less with their Sharingan activated. A right out removal would be- “I’m sick of being blind as a mole”, the Uchiha grumbled. “Get on with it.”

Without hesitation, the Shoudaime covered the young Uchiha’s left eye with his hand, before ever so carefully extracting the eye-ball, carefully keeping it secured in his palm as he covered the empty socket with his other hand. She could see it, its red Sharingan was still activated even! She had never seen an Uchiha’s eye up close, least of all been able to examine one, this was- Calmly, Tsunade lowered a manicured hand on her shoulder and she swallowed at the realisation that Madara was watching their every step, not breaking eye-contact. Suddenly, Shizune didn’t have a shred of doubt he would kill her if she even so much as attempted to move into his general direction, no matter how civile he had been to her during the last few hours.

Legs still trembling, the Nidaime got on his feet, supported by Hashirama’s clone. “What about Kakuzu?”, he asked and the third man -Kakuzu, apparently- attempted to get up as well, but slumped to the ground again, throwing up another mouthful of blood. “His metabolism is on the verge of collapsing, but I got the degeneration under control”, the clone treating him answered. “Most of his organs are ruptured and three of his hearts have stopped but I managed to re-start two already.” And wasn’t that a sentence even Tsunade probably heard for the first time.

“He tanked the jump”, the younger Uchiha said. “Time-leaps cause excessive damage the longer they get and he is the only one able to deal with the fallout.”

Hashirama stared at him, not pausing his gentle nin-jutsu. “You lost me.”

“Good. You might consider whom you’re sharing this information this, Izuna”, the Nidaime cautioned calmly, for the first time looking directly at Shizune and her Kage. He looked… Just like his stone-image with his piercing red eyes. Shizune found herself evading them.

“Ah.” The Shoudaime laughed. “Nothing to worry about, Tobirama. That’s my granddaughter.”

For probably the first time since birth, Tobirama was rendered utterly speechless. His mouth opened, merely to close again and opened a second time as he stared at his older brother in absolute disbelief, then at Tsunade, merely to turn his head back to him. And somehow, Shizune thought, watching the ever-collected (or at least that was told about him) Second Hokage right now, his mouth agape in unnamed emotion and his eyes attempting to fall out of their sockets, made this whole situation nearly entertaining.

“… What…”, the Nidaime managed to force out and Hashirama blinked, before he laughed sheepishly. “Well, that came across wrong”, he confessed and Madara huffed. “No shit, idiot”, he cut in, finally stepping back after Izuna started batting at his hands in order to glare at his moron of a lover.

“Something went wrong during the battle… I can only remember something ripping before the pain set in, we woke up not too far from the village.” He huffed again and Shizune thought it might even be in amusement, though she couldn’t be certain. “Turned out she is indeed the granddaughter of Senju Hashirama, the Shoudaime Hokage of Konohagakure… Except not this”, he vaguely gestured at Hashirama, “Senju Hashirama, Shoudaime of Konohagakure.”

Unsurprisingly, Tobirama was the one who caught up first. “A parallel time-line”, he realised, seeming in awe at the realisation -another first, Hashirama noted, finally lowering his hands. Izuna turned around, watching the two women head to toe and apparently quickly catching up to whom of them they were referring to. Then, he grinned widely, as he watched the Fifth Hokage. “Well… I’d say you passed on *a lot* of wood there.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: "Having wood in front of the hut" is the german slang for having big boobs - rhyme not intended.
Tsunade might not have inherited the Mokuton but she sure as hell got a lot of wood from grandpa.

Chapter 51

Chapter Summary

> Tobirama doing science.
> Izuna explaining science.
> Because with Izuna doing science, shit would just go Boom and with Tobirama explaining science, nobody would understand anything.

Chapter Notes

> This took nearly two months because I handed in my Master's thesis two days ago, ahhhhh....
> And well, the very next day I got sick so now I'm suffering in bed. I really wanted to finally update this story, though, so please forgive me if I don't answer your precious comments right away, like I normally do, because I just got so tired any my head is killing me. I'm sorry :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Uchiha Madara had a beautiful laugh.

Six words Shizune would have never even dreamed about in combination and even now, they still seemed surreal. And yet that didn't make them any less true. Had *her* Konoha's second founder been like this, too, she couldn't help but wonder. Uchiha Madara's name was spoken hushed, rarely anything was known about him other than him founding the village, abandoning it, and battling the Shoudaime to the death. He wasn't considered human, more of a nightmare than anything else… But if he had been anything like *this* Uchiha Madara, he had been a man with a sharp tongue and an equally sharp intelligence, a man rather than… a monster.

Maybe she would mourn him this evening, when she was alone, despite his history… Nobody else would, after all.

"We just leaped numerous years instead of seconds not only into the future but apparently into an alternating time-line and the first thing you do is being an indecent embarrassment", Tobirama growled, as the Shoudaime's clones sunk back into the earth. Unfortunately, Izuna proved to be rather unimpressed, critically watching the blonde women. "I hope she didn't get his brains, too." "I'd say Mito's genes made it in that regard", Madara answered, having his little brother blink once, before pulling himself up to his (sadly rather unimpressive) full height as he glared at his Kage.

“You said it was a different Hashirama”, the Shoudaime cried, but it only made his lover huff. “Doesn’t change that fact I’m pissed with *this* Hashirama, too”, he gave back relentlessly, pointing at him.

Kakuzu shrugged and crossed his arms. “Mito already offered surrogation and you already beat up your husband. I fail to see the issue.”

Shizune stared.

Tsunade stared.

Madara huffed, arguing for what felt like the umpteenth time: “We’re not married.”

“Yet”, Hashirama offered, helpful as always, only to have his Uchiha cross his arms, too. “Be glad if I ever allow you to touch me again after this.”

“But…”

“You married that Uzumaki and had kids with her, don’t you dare think I’ll forget that.”

“You already said it’s not *us* us”, Hashirama cried. “You weren’t even-” *“You did what?!”*

The Shoudaime shrieked and took a step back, his panicked gaze flicking between Izuna, who stared at him, eyes blazing, and his grand-daughter. “Ahaha… T…Tsunade, would you explain how-” “Don’t you drag your grand-daughter into this”, Madara threatened mildly. The God of Shinobi slumped, merely muttering: “Yes, love”, gloomy clouds hovering above his head.

“Mito is a beautiful, gifted and intelligent women.” Now Tobirama crossed his arms, too. Great… “I cannot see you being in love with her.” Hashirama looked up, blinking at his little brother, whose frown got even deeper. He felt as though he should be insulted, somehow. “You are a dreamer and an idealist, sometimes even ridiculously so. Mito is far too grounded to ever be able to develop more than companionship towards you. And you might have been able to love her, as you tend to do with all your comrades, but I fail to see you ever *falling in* love with her.” Tobirama’s fingers drummed on his arms. “If these essential traits still apply here, I cannot see that marriage resulting in anything more than the obligatory arrangement it started as.”

“So…” It was Tsunade who spoke up and made her great-uncle look at her. “You think my grandparents’ marriage wasn’t…?”

“Happy?”, Tobirama asked. “It probably was, as much as the circumstances allowed it to be. But don’t be mistaken, Tsunade-san, if your Hashirama was similar to this one, I doubt there were any shared feelings other than comradery.”

“Mito would’ve eaten you for breakfast, you’re no match for her”, Izuna muttered, but at least his glare had lost some of its heat. “Just be glad she had the guts to tell you off.”

At that, Hashirama peeked up. “Where is she, anyway?”, he asked, either not realising or caring about the insult. Probably a mixture of both. “Where’s the others? What happened

after…?"

"After you disappeared, the cloud-shinobi withdrew, as did the Uzumaki", Tobirama reported. "But our own rows were in disarray, too, due to your disappearance so we decided to refrain from pursuing. They withdrew quite afar north and are under heavy observation."

His older brother's next question didn't surprise in the slightest, yet Tobirama wished he had refrained from asking. "Matatabi! What about Matatabi?"

"Our sensors are searching for her chakra-signature but they haven't been successful yet." "We haven't found a body, though", Izuna cut in. "For all we know, she could have disappeared just like the two of you did."

She hadn't. Deep, deep down, Hashirama knew she hadn't. Something terrible had happened and she had been snuffed out, like a dying candle-flame. He bit his tongue. As soon as they were back, he would seek out any traces left. He would find whatever remained, he would consult the other tailed beasts. Whatever Cloud had used, he would un-do it. He never had a sister! He would get back his first and only one! Madara could deal with the rest. With Cloud. He could- "It will be my *pleasure*."

The purr in his words made goosebumps raise on Shizune's arms and something rather different in the Shoudaime's pants, as he stared at the Uchiha patriarch in a haze. "… What?"

A gloved hand cupped his cheek and he couldn't even help but be a tad bothered with how a man's smile could be so equally soft and… maniac. "I will take care of them for you", Madara promised softly. "Each and every one. You don't need to stain your hands with their filth anymore."

The Shoudaime stared back, right into the endless abyss of his black eyes. "I-" "If you want to fuck on the Hokage-desk tell us now, so we can leave before you go at it."

Madara turned to glare at his disruptive little brother and Hashirama blinked twice, before actually shaking his head like a dazed dog. "That's not what I meant", he complained, before he quickly -and quite obviously- changed the topic. "How did you get here, anyway?"

Tobirama's quick glance at the two women made Izuna roll his eyes. "Don't be a spoilsport, Tobes. It took four of us to make it here, I doubt-" "Don't call me that", Tobirama barked for the umpteenth time, well aware it wouldn't change anything but refusing to back down on the matter. Then, he turned back to his brother. "Kakuzu, Izuna and me had been working together for a while already. Later, Mito joined, as well. To make it simple, we tried to seal and multiply Izuna's Mangekyou Sharingan ability."

"You did *what*?"

Izuna rolled his eyes. "Don't be like that, Aniki, you would've done the same. Turned out, these eyes of mine… or yours? I mean, they have been yours before we switched, can do little leaps in time. Pretty convenient, but rarely enough to do real useful stuff - Tobirama disagrees, by the way. But well… After weeks of trying, Mito developed a seal able to… well, seal the time-leap I cast onto it and unleash it later."

“The next step”, Tobirama cut in smoothly, “Has been figuring out how to combine them, to lengthen the leap from its original count.” He shook his head, obviously still bothered, when he exclaimed: “You have no idea how hard that was.”

“Neither do I”, Izuna grinned. “When it comes to sealing-expertise, I’m just the prettiest decoration in the room. But Mito managed to connect the seals, which allowed us to release them in row, so the end of the last leap instantly started the next one. By now, we can just beat the clock endlessly -as long as there’s enough seals!”

“We had already experimented with a Hiraishin combination”, Tobirama took over again. “And it turned out, the Hiraishin is truly able to teleport to any destination previously marked -even if it’s in the future. Unfortunately, the strain on our bodies is far higher than on Izuna’s, who is the original caster of the time-leap and barely even notices anything. Our bodies just aren’t designed to withstand instant time-changes.”

“But…” Hashirama looked between them, entirely lost. “What does that have to do with anything? I mean, I’m happy you are such good friends now, but it doesn’t explain anything!”

Izuna scratched his head. “You know”, he said. “I know I’m the dumbest tool in our four-men-woman clique. But well, at least I still got it better than you.”

“Hey!”

Tobirama rolled his eyes, throwing a sour glance at Kakuzu who hadn’t even tried so far to explain anything and merely watched the shit-show. Cheater.

“There’s only two dimensions”, Tobirama explained. “Time and space. Everything that exists happens in a combination of these. When you disappeared from the battlefield, we didn’t know which was the one you changed. But Mito realised after I was unable to reach you with the Hiraishin, that we could cross out space, because otherwise I would have been summoned to you or you would have found a way to somehow contact us, no matter *where* you were.” If they hadn’t been dead but… None of them had wanted to think about that possibility, truly. Not even Tobirama who had always taken pride in his own objectiveness. “That meant we had to figure out *when* you were, not *where*, because no summoning can cross time. Summons always have to be in the same time-dimension, even if the difference in space doesn’t matter.”

Izuna grinned. “Normally, that would have mattered a great deal. But well, we had already gotten rid of that annoying time-problem way before you two acted up.”

“The Hiraishin is related to summoning-jutsu”, Tobirama explained. “But it isn’t one. Not exactly. When it’s triggered, the caster appears at the target-seal. But to keep the chakra-expense down, the user enters a dimensional void first and from there gets summoned to the chosen target-seal. Otherwise the jutsu would be far too chakra-consuming.”

“Are you getting where this is going?”, Izuna asked, however, Hashirama merely blinked at him and the younger Uchiha sighed. “Well… Alright then. To wrap things up: We just had to combine all that stuff. I prepared a bunch of sealed time-leaps. Mito connected them so we’d have the time-margin to move out of the void and towards the target. Then her and Tobirama

kinda tied us together, don't ask me how, if you do you'll get another half hour of explanation. Anyway… Tobirama used the Hiraishin to summon himself to you, Hashirama. Tobes got you marked with a Hiraishin-seal right after inventing it -well, and then he marked everything else; one day he won't even walk to the loo anymore. Right when he casted, I leaped him, Kakuzu and me forward in time. We must have entered the dimensional void, as planned, since there's no way I could have crossed enough years to meet your *grand-daughter*, and from there the sealed leaps connected and the Hiraishin summoned us straight to you. Unfortunately, the whole issue apparently was harsher than excepted… Kakuzu is the only one of us able to survive the effects of such long leap other than me, so he had to come with us and tank Tobirama's damage. Apparently, my eyes over-loaded with three people to take across a few decades and Tobes over there got his entire chakra drained by the Hiraishin-cast." Izuna grinned. "We still have no idea how you got here in the first place, though", he concluded cheerily.

Madara crossed his arms. "As innovative as this is", he said, "I hope you also thought of a way *back*."

Izuna rolled his eyes as though his older brother hadn't just addressed a major difficulty in the universe's rules. "That's why Mito stayed behind, duh", he explained. "She'll-" "Can't we just leave it at that?", Hashirama begged and despite himself, Madara could help but laugh. "That bad?", he asked and his smile was genuine, as his Hokage looked at him, utterly miserable.

Tobirama sighed. "Let's just say we'll need a lot of chakra but figured that wouldn't be a problem." Nevertheless, he was relieved when his older brother answered: "My reserves are nearly half-full, again."

"How much chakra *do* you have?"

It had been one of the women who had asked, the one with the black hair. Not his potential great-niece. "Enough to blind even the least talented sensors around him", the Nidaime answered. "Kneading chakra around him is like staring into the sun while attempting to spot a candle-flame in it. I learned long since to refrain from doing so unless I truly need to."

"Refrain from it, too, as long as we're here", Madara asked calmly, yet with a certain urgency that had Tobirama pause. Madara had a rather unwelcome tendency to act… rash, to name it benevolent. But this calm certainty, Tobirama thought, supressing the urge to knead chakra right because it had been asked, was unusual for him.

"You will explain later?", he asked -or maybe demanded- and the Uchiha gave a short nod. Having to explain why Tobirama would find no Senju chakra sources except Tsunade -and no Uchiha chakra other than a single small one out of this room- would be poison to both, his own sanity and perhaps Tobirama's as well.

Hashirama looked at the cards he was still holding -horrible, no single pair and the weakest possible numbers- and then, his gaze met Tsunade's, who had watched the previous scenes in silence. "I guess this is Goodbye", he said softly.

“But-” It wasn’t Tsunade who spoke up again, but her assistant, looking hesitantly between them. “Tsunade-sama has…” “I have something for you”, the current Hokage continued calmly. “I… Would have wanted to go through it with you tomorrow, but as things seem now, we won’t have that much time.” She pulled something out from… somewhere between her impressive cleavage and Madara realised it was a book, bound in a hard cover. Books were precious, most people including the Uchiha had only ever been able to afford scrolls. And it wasn’t even a small book. Where had she even stored… No, he decided, pondering about it wouldn’t do the situation any good.

She handed it to Hashirama, who took the book with careful hands, opening the first few pages. “This is…” “Lung diseases”, Tsunade confirmed. “Technically, cystic fibrosis is a genetic disease and therefore uncurable, even by today’s medical knowledge. But it manifests in the lungs most drastically and there’s a whole chapter on-” “Thank you!” Hashirama beamed at her, truly beamed, little daisies sprouting around his feet as he got up and pulled his not-quite grand-daughter into a tight hug. “I never knew how Tobirama could bear to stare at cramped pages for hours but I will read this! All of it! I don’t even know how to thank you, I-” Suddenly, his eyes sparked and he pulled the leather band from his neck, weighting it in his hand. “It’s just a cheap crystal I won years ago, but I infused it with chakra when… ahaha, whenever I grew bored with paper-work, so… I don’t know how you can use it, but there should be stored quite some in it. But well, at the worst you can throw it at your opponents and collapse a mountain with it.”

Shizune stared, her mouth falling open. That… That was… “You already gifted it to me”, Tsunade said, her voice uncharacteristically thick. “When I turned five, you said I deserved a proper gift, not some boring…” She stopped. “I… I gave yours to Naruto when he bested me in a bet to make me Hokage”, she whispered. “I can’t-” Hashirama’s genuine laughter interrupted her and he smiled at her, with all the benevolence she remembered from her beloved grand-father. And then, she felt tears fill her eyes, as he winked at her. “Good! The kid deserves it; take care of him and his unwilling friend. I’ll get a new one, and…” He hesitated. “And if I should have a grand-daughter one day, I’ll… I’ll gift it to her on her birthday.”

Now, the tears spilled free and Hashirama couldn’t supress the *Oof* escaping him, as Tsunade squeezed him tightly enough to make his ribs ache. “I missed you”, she whispered, however, before he was able to do something -hug her back, soothe her, look at Madara for help- she released him. She took a step back, straightening her back, and slipped the cheap cord with its equally cheap crystal over her head. “What can we do to help you get back?”

“Nothing much”, Tobirama answered. “Make sure we won’t get interrupted, the preparations won’t need long.” He took out a piece of chalk from his pockets and without preamble started drawing a complicated sealing-circle on the floor, just large enough the five of them would be able to fit in if they ignored personal space. Then, he unfurled another seal and Tsunade blinked. “Those are grand-mother’s sealing chains”, she recognised and Tobirama didn’t even look up as he answered: “Of course. How else are we supposed to force a re-connection to her after we entered the dimensional void?”

It didn’t even take him five minutes to finish and put the chalk back in his pocket. “Remove your shoes”, he then ordered. “Do we need to care not to step on the formula?”, Madara

asked and the Nidaime shook his head. “Contrary”, he said, already getting out of his own shoes. “You *need* to touch the formula. Just make sure you don’t smudge it.”

It was harsh, Tsunade realised, as she watched Hashirama step into the circle, to have her grandfather torn from her for a second time. Maybe even worse than the first, because this time, they were both adults. Hell, she was far older than him, not that he was aware. Nevertheless, she would have wished for some more time with him. To drink together, gamble some, listen to his inspiring ideals he never strode from. Or maybe, she thought, as she watched him entwine his fingers witch Uchiha Madara as they stood pressed into each other, he did stride from them… once, when her grandfather had chosen Uzumaki Mito -or perhaps, he only had done so after the battle in the Valley of the End.

“Tsunade.”

She looked up to meet Uchiha Madara’s pitch-black eyes.

“Make him proud.”

Her hands balled into fists, hidden under her crossed arms. “I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Did Tobirama put a Hiraishin-seal somewhere in Tsunade's office when he was off-screen?
You bet he did.
You may imagine where this leads. The emphasis is on imagine, though, because it won't happen on screen, else I never get finished.

Chapter 52

Chapter Summary

Bullshit pseudo-science.
Then bullshit pseudo-psychology

Chapter Notes

When you think you have time but you actually don't because you have to do all the stuff you didn't do before when you didn't have time.
You know what I mean?

The good news: Their return was far less spectacular than their arrival.

The bad news: Hashirama's blood seeping out of his mouth, ears and nose in a steady stream wasn't exactly comforting, either.

"I'm good."

"Good as dead", Tobirama hissed, his voice betraying the expression of something slightly sharper than the deepest pits of worry. "What did you *do*?!"

"I didn't want-" He coughed up blood and made a face at the inconvenience. "I didn't want Kakuzu-kun to wear the brunt of it, again." He was already starting to heal. The internal bleedings were uncomfortable, he could feel the blood pooling into places it didn't belong but the ruptured organs started knitting together again, closing the worst ruptures first, before slowly mending the cuts and tears that still leaked blood. A hot bath would be nice, to wash off the blood that by now stuck to his skin. Maybe he could convince Madara to go with him, some relaxing would do them both good.

"Please don't die. It was a major feat to come up with the seal-structures necessary to get you back."

Hashirama coughed a laugh, alongside some more blood. The last, though, as he could feel the lung punctures fully mending. He would have to get rid of the remains, clogged blood was anything but comfortable down there. "Sorry for the inconvenience, Mito-san."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I thought we were over the honorifics."

“Oh, he better not be with all the stuff he’s going to throw at you”, Madara huffed, his annoyance spiking again once the Shoudaime started healing himself.

“Turns out you got a grand-daughter.” Izuna. Of course it would be Izuna, the little weasel. Mito frowned. “I assume, the distancing factor was indeed time, then?”, she asked, not even bothering to indulge him by asking for an explanation. Izuna opened his mouth but unfortunately -or fortunately, depending on the view- Tobirama was the one who spoke up. “Since time apparently runs at a parallel pace, no matter its distance, we didn’t linger long. But apparently it was indeed a future-leap… except not by forty seconds but at least as many years.”

Most probably more than that, Madara deemed. Tsunade might have been young, but there was no way only forty years had passed between now and that… alternative version of events. Maybe, Hashirama had sired children much later, when he had gotten older himself. His vitality would surely allow him to. But… “It makes no sense”, he frowned, as his fingers absently started to drum on his crossed arms. The thought didn’t cross him for the first time, but until now, there had simply always been more pressing matters than pondering about the How. “When Hashirama disappeared, I reversed it. I cannot interfere with the future, it hasn’t happened yet, after all.”

For a beat, it was silent, until Izuna spoke up. “When Matatabi disappeared, I leaped forward in time to figure out what happened. I can’t go *back*, only forward.” There was no hint of his mischievous brother now, he was all business, brows drawn together in a tight frown, arms crossed in a mirrored expression to his older brother.

“Your Mangekyou Sharingan allows you to change the past time?”, Tobirama asked, making the Uchiha patriarch nod at him, his own slim brows drawn together in a frown, too. “Not too much, though”, he cautioned. “Roughly five to six minutes. Everything that happened prior, I am unable to change.” There were limits to everything, after all, even the blessed eyes. And the longer periods of time he reversed, the greater the chakra expense.

“Even if we ignore the fact that time actually shouldn’t be possible to manipulate at all”, which they all could, no problem here, every single one of them had broken more than enough laws of physics, “It cannot go both ways. Either forward or in reverse but not both.” Mito’s frown got deeper, as she continued: “And certainly not both simultaneously.”

Hashirama sighed and pouted ever so slightly, the gesture crude with his still blood-stained face. “I don’t follow.”

For once, Tobirama couldn’t blame him. They all had tried to come up with an explanation for two days now and failed, after all. But they were close, he could feel it. Just a few more missing puzzle-pieces, a little more information. “Water cannot simultaneously flow into two different directions. Same with time: It can either go forwards -or, as we just learned, backwards. But there is no way it can do both.” Then, his sharp lips thinned. “What did you do?”

Hashirama blinked. “Me? I don’t have fancy eyes, I can’t-” Tobirama’s eye-roll cut him off as efficient as any verbal interruption. “When you noticed what happened to Matatabi. What did

you do?" There was no way his brother wasn't involved in whatever had happened. He was too strong not to, pure and simple, whether he acknowledged it or not.

"I…" Hashirama hesitated. "I had sewn my lips together, to keep from answering the voice that kept calling out. I didn't expect it to be that hard, especially when I was fighting these shinobi with their strange weapons, but I… I heard her scream and…" He shook his head. "I yelled back. And then I woke up next to Madara. Alone. His lungs were failing and his eyes badly bruised, so I started to heal him with what little chakra I had left."

"You were *out of chakra*?" The idea seemed ridiculous and despite the usually completely ordinary statement, Tobirama couldn't help but question it. His brother was an ocean, no, an abyss filled with chakra. He could tumble mountains with sheer will alone and the fight hadn't robbed him of even a shred. The chakra-drain had to be unimaginable, to result in that, nobody else could have even hoped to survive it.

"Madara was off even worse", Hashirama muttered, tearing him out of his thoughts. "But… Yes, I pretty much was. I woke up before him but neither of us could remember how we got there at all." For once having nothing of value to add to the conversation, Madara merely nodded.

Unlike the rest of them, Mito didn't have her arms crossed, when she spoke up again. She did, however, supress the impulse to draw a scheme on the mirror with her lipstick. "The disappearance of Matatabi and the both of you was simultaneous, as much as we can say", she noted. "If you", she pointed at Madara, "Reversed? Is that right? Wait, don't answer, the correct terms are irrelevant now. So, you went back in time to un-do Hashirama's disappearance-" Madara shook his head. "I myself don't move back in time if I don't choose to", he corrected. "I reverse other entities in time, objects and people alike. I merely can choose to be one of those, should I want to."

The Uzumaki huffed. "Schematics", she said. "Doesn't matter. What matters is that you forced time to go backwards. Whether it was time or something in time, I'm not sure matters. But when you reversed the flow of time, Izuna was already channelling himself forward. His goal was Matatabi, though, not Hashirama."

"So was mine."

That got him some stares. Madara refrained from rolling his eyes, instead settling on a huff. "Do you really think I only aimed for Hashirama when I reversed? Matatabi was gone, too. I reversed both of them."

Of course, Izuna thought. Of course, his brother could focus on multiple targets other than he himself, who was only able to leap forward one at a time. Mito stared at him. "And you didn't tell us until now, why?", she asked slowly, making the Uchiha patriarch throw her a flat look. "It didn't exactly come up until half a minute ago", he drawled.

Mito, of course, didn't buy that excuse. Instead, she threw her hands up in the air in a gesture that strangely resembled Hashirama's overly handsy attics. "Kami, throw brains for them from heaven", she groaned. "Now it all makes sense."

“What makes sense?” Hashirama loved these people. He really, really did. But they did have a way to make him feel mentally disabled and while he was very aware he wasn’t known as the Kami no Shinobi due to his brilliant mind, he did feel left out, at times.

Tobirama opened his mouth to explain. Surprisingly though, it was someone else who cut in, first. “Matatabi disappeared”, Kakuzu started, having them all turn at him in some degree of surprise, considering he hadn’t partaken in the analysis so far. The assassin waited for his Hokage to nod, before he continued. “Izuna moved time forward, targeting her.” Another nod. “You disappeared.” A third nod. So far, it made sense. “Madara moved time backward, targeting you. But he also targeted *her*.” Nod number four. So far, so good. “Izuna forced time to move forward. Madara forced it backwards. Both targeted Matatabi. But time cannot flow forward and backwards simultaneously.”

“A seal with opposing layers just will do nothing at all”, Mito cut in. “But if you add chakra, you might get a reaction… A mix of two layers. Unpredictable, though. And the mightier the seal, the more chakra is necessary to force a reaction.”

Tobirama still hadn’t un-crossed his arms. “Under normal circumstances, two opposing time-interferences with the same goal might have cancelled each other out, resulting in nothing happening at all. But since Madara didn’t only target Matatabi but also *you*-” “There was enough chakra to force a reaction”, Hashirama finished, relieved when Tobirama actually nodded. “Though I don’t know why it would send you into the future. Madara is stronger than Izuna. If anything, you should have been sent into the past.”

“No.” Again, the attention shifted, now back to Madara again, who pursed his lips ever so slightly, as he corrected: “I force time to reverse and thus, create alternative outcomes, differing from the original events. The future we have been tossed into wasn’t ours, once one cared for the details. It merely was… will be… an alternative outcome, if specific events had differed.”

That actually managed to take the everyone but Hashirama by surprise. “It wasn’t the current future?”, Tobirama asked and Madara shook his head. “No.” Then, he made a face. “And it’s not one we should stride after, either.” Hashirama could only agree with that and then blinked in surprise, as his lover chuckled. “Your grand-daughter wasn’t too bad, though.”

“No”, the Shoudaime agreed, looking down at the book he still held in his hands. “She wasn’t.”

“Stupid idiot.”

“Ma-“

“Devastatingly dumb moron.”

“Mada-”

“Imbecile dumb-ass.”

“I-“

Still not even bothering with raising his voice, the raven continued. “Ignorant fuck-face.”

“Madara!” Hashirama’s whine was louder than usual, so close to his ear, not that it would save him. Hashirama was all of that, not that the idiot realised it, in his desire to be *good* and *proper*.

When his dumb-witted lover had proposed to spend the night together, after the taxing, even though short, involuntary trip to his not-quite grand-daughter, Madara had agreed. Their last night together had been rather un-refreshing, both of them sleeping with their backs to each other, to be able to protect from potential threats in an un-known environment.

So when both, Tobirama and Izuna had sent them to an early night’s rest because they apparently had something very important to discuss in the morning that they were unwilling to share with them at their current tired stage, Madara had assumed there would be at least some sleeping together before getting to the actual *sleeping* part. But unfortunately, Hashirama was a moron. An idiot. A “Dim-witted wood-brain.”

The Shoudaime’s arms tightened from where Hashirama had wrapped them around him, his back pulled flush to his tanned, bare chest. He made a face; Hashirama knew he only tolerated such close contact when they were on good terms and right now the scales tipped to seriously pissed off. “I’m sorry”, Hashirama murmured. “But I… It wouldn’t be right. We have to talk about-”

Roughly, Madara turned around, his raven hair covering most of his face due to the notion. Hashirama released his hold, to allow him the movement. *”What”*, he snarled, “Do you want to talk about?!” His black eyes burned into Hashirama’s and he supressed the urge to bare his teeth at him to underline the threat.

“We know that Konoha wasn’t ours, but whatever happened there, can still happen here! I… I killed you, Madara, at least one version of me did! We can’t just… We can’t just ignore it, I need to make sure -” *”Enough!”* Despite his appearance, his battle-prowess or his social rank, Madara rarely ever harshly commanded. He just couldn’t be bothered. People either respected him without or face the consequences. But now, his teeth were grit and he ungently forced Hashirama’s arms open to get on his feet. “I’ll sleep in my own house.”

Hashirama nodded. “I understand. It will be better, if you can think abou-” The Shoudaime didn’t know what came first. Maybe it was the snarl, that nearly spat fire right in his face. Maybe it was the dorsum of a slender foot that hit him right in the face, breaking his lower jaw in two different places, as its unsuspecting victim crashed right into the bedroom-wall. The seals Mito had installed held, so he didn’t tear through the whole (and the next) house, but his body still took all of the impact-energy, making him fall to the ground uselessly for a moment, numb with pain.

“Selfish prick!“

Blood started to seep from his mouth, dripping down his deformed chin, as he stared at Madara, who towered above him. His hands balled into fists, his hair even more voluminous

than usual, as if to keep others away by force, his whole body shaking in- Hashirama blinked. In tears. Running down his cheeks and dripping from his chin, they wet the Uchiha's pale skin, in strange contrast to his grit teeth and blasting eyes.

"It has to be about you, doesn't it, Hashirama?!", he seethed. "*You* are sorry, *you* want to make it up, *you* can't let it go!" He bared his teeth, strangely reminiscent to a cornered wild animal. "What about me?! You killed me and despite your constant denying, we both know you are stronger than me, if it came down to it. I am very aware, Hashirama, that you are able to kill me, just as one of you has already done! Nevertheless, I decided to trust you and at every single opportunity, you *elide my choice!* My craving for *closeness*, my craving for *reassurance*, my craving for *you*!" Hashirama felt his jaw healing wrongly, the bones weren't set at all. He would have to break it again, he realised somewhere in the back of his mind, as he stared at his lover, the tear-strains still wet on his beautiful face. A moment passed in silence and the Uchiha took a breath. "I'll go to my house", he said, quietly this time. "Since obviously, my needs are unappreciated. Don't be late tomorrow, I won't be there to wake you."

And then, he was gone, and all Hashirama could do was to stare at the spot his love had stood just moments prior, telling him how- He felt tears drip down his cheeks, hot and large. Telling how he had failed to notice that despite all they had been forced to realise not he himself was the one in need for comfort and closeness, that of course Madara would want to convince himself Hashirama wouldn't hurt him, would rather kill himself than harm him, only to be rebuked by none other than Hashirama himself for it. All the best intentions and he had apparently managed to right out ignore his lover's needs in his intend to make it up to him, to prove him he could be trusted despite it all.

With two short snaps, his jaw was re-broken but he didn't wait for it to fully heal, as he held it with a hand to have the bones set correctly, before getting to his feet and rushing to the window.

"Madara! Wait!"

It was a useless undertake from the start and he knew it. Madara was fast, faster even than Hashirama and he wouldn't have lingered until Hashirama had woken from his stupor. On long runs Hashirama might have been able to close up to him, due to his superior strength, but the way to the Uchiha clanhead's house was at least half a country too short. Nevertheless, he knocked on his door a few seconds later. "Madara? Please open up! I'm sorry, I… I'm sorry", he repeated lamely, knocking again after a few moments of silence. "Madara, please-"

The door swung open, barely missing his face.

"So…" Izuna cocked an eyebrow. "You fucked up again."

"I'm so sorry", at least this time, he didn't cry. "I didn't realise-" The younger Uchiha lifted a hand, interrupting his nth apology. "Aniki made it very clear he doesn't want to talk to you and I don't have the patience to listen to your whiney explanations right now. See you in the morning."

And just like that, he closed the door, leaving a devastated Hokage at his door-step. He could knock again, try to get Madara to talk to him, but what good would it do? Madara had wanted closeness and he had dismissed his choice. Now, he wanted to be alone and while Hashirama might not be the most intelligent shinobi this side of Fire-Country (and not too proud to admit such freely), he didn't make the same mistakes twice. Madara didn't want his company right now and he wouldn't force himself upon him. But he wouldn't just leave him, either. If Madara changed his mind, he'd be there, he'd do whatever needed to make amends. He would wait until Madara made his choice.

Silently, he sunk to his knees in front of the door.

Chapter 53

Chapter Summary

> Featuring a big reveal that is none at all because we already knew most of it but that was like 15 chapters ago. Also Hashirama being an idiot who still tries his best.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

> Even after four years I still don't know how to insert links in chapter notes and I never thought it'd really matter but then, after over 50 chapters, something happened... FANART! I still can't believe it, thank you so much!
>
> So if you're interested in the viuals of Madara's ted talk from last chapter, you might want to see this. Praise the artistic people!

“What do you think you are doing?”

Hashirama looked up. “Waiting”, he simpered. Unfortunately, it didn’t help brightening the mood.

“I see that”, Madara snarled back. “Get the fuck away from my porch or I’ll-” “No.” It was strange, to look up to Madara, Hashirama mused. He was used to being taller than the raven, this angle allowed a different view of his features and made his hair look less voluminous, somehow. Unfortunately, his lover was less than pleased with his answer. His onyx eyes narrowed and he took a step forward. “If you don’t leave right now, I will make you”, he hissed, his hair spiking in anger. Like a furious cat, Hashirama marvelled. Ready to claw out your eyes as soon as you came too close for comfort.

“I’ll stay until you talk to me”, Hashirama answered. “If you aren’t ready, I will wait some more. Please, go back to sleep, it’s only been three hours.” At least that was how long he estimated he was already sitting here.

“If I only could”, Madara spat back, “With your ocean of chakra looming in front of my door!”

That, finally, got the Shoudaime's attention and he blinked. "My chakra never bothered you before."

"Because it hasn't been sitting in front of my door, you stupid knob-head!"

And just like that, the door was slammed close in front of his nose. Hashirama sighed soundlessly. It didn't matter. He could wait.

He must have nodded off some time before dawn, Hashirama realised. Roots and tendrils had crawled across the porch, some wrapped around his ankle and he caressed the one that hadn't quite made it, stopping limp just inches away from his skin. "There, there." A cherry tree, sickly with fungi. It had made it all the way from a few houses down, in hope for aid. "Such a long way", he soothed. "Don't worry, well get that dealt with." Fungi were… weird. They weren't plants, he couldn't set up any kind of connection with them. And while they were mandatory in co-existence with the trees, they were harmful to those with weaknesses. He sent soothing chakra into the tendril, strengthening the poor one to allow it to withstand the infestation. Once a tree was infected with fungi, it usually marked the beginning of the end, but he could bend that rule, just a little. After all- "*What the fuck* are you doing?!"

He looked up. Madara was standing in the doorway, the circles under his eyes more prominent, his hair a wonderful mess that made him seem taller and wider than his slender frame actually was. He blinked. "Good morning."

And just like that, the door was yanked close again. His shoulders slumped and the poor cherry root that had curled around his hand wilted with him.

What had he done this time?

"And what are you doing here?"

Hashirama turned around without getting up. "Good morning, Tobirama."

At least his little brother couldn't slam the door in his face, too, considering he stood outside. He still looked pissed off, though. "What did you do this time?"

A deep sigh escaped the Shoudaime. "Nothing." And apparently, exactly that had been the problem. He had thought- The door opened again and his head shot up, but it was Izuna who stood at the door, not his older brother.

"What did he do this time?"

Apparently, Tobirama didn't believe him, since he aimed the same question at Izuna, who made a face. "Beats me", he answered. "Aniki didn't exactly feel like talking."

But he should! How were they supposed to solve this, if Madara refused to talk about it! He was willing to wait; he would do so for days, weeks, sitting at the Uchiha's porch, if it only

would help. But to assume it would grand him anything other than his butt kicked would have been highly optimistic at best; at most merely delusional. He looked up when Madara appeared next to Izuna in the door.

“Can’t you fuck around on someone else’s porch?!”

“Unfortunately, yours is the only one with the Uchiha clan-head.” Tobirama was relentless and Hashirama sighed. “Now get up from the floor, Anija, we have places to be.” Without waiting for confirmation, he grabbed his older brother’s collar, dragging him up to his feet, twitching at the realisation Hashirama didn’t even wear shoes. Didn’t he have *any* dignity?! He huffed at the thought before it had even fully formed. No, of course he didn’t. Not when it came to the people he held close.

“Good”, Madara drawled, getting ready to slam the door close yet again, merely to be stopped by Tobirama, who looked up from where his older brother still wilted in self-pity. “*We* includes you”, he blandly told him. “At least try to make yourself presentable.” He didn’t even bother clarifying whom of them he was referring to, not that it truly mattered.

The Uchiha clan-head had the gall to glare at him. “I don’t exactly feel like outings today, Tobirama.”

“And I don’t exactly feel like giving a fuck, so get decent and be at the tower in twenty minutes.” He grabbed his older brother’s collar, dragging him up and cast a look at Izuna. “Don’t let him be late.”

The younger Uchiha made a face. “No promises.”

Tobirama huffed. If nothing else the little weasel was honest, he deemed, as he dragged Hashirama off. At least he didn’t stink after spending the night wallowing at the Uchihas’ porch. Yet.

“This can wait until tomorrow.”

Izuna closed the door, making his way to the kitchen to set up water for tea, before answering his older brother. “Not really.”

At that, Madara blinked. Izuna rarely considered things… pressing. If anything, he would drag them out further, considering *pressing matters* mostly meant work. And if it came to work, Izuna preferred to pretend ignorance, unless the matter was indeed dire. “Fine.”

“You’re on time.” At least something positive, Tobirama deemed. The two of them had been waiting in front of the Hokage-Tower for even less than a minute. He had bullied Hashirama to the bathroom and into a fresh set of clothes, too. Unfortunately, it had done little to improve his older brother’s mood.

“Madara, I-” “I assume this is important”, the older Uchiha cut his Hokage off, making Tobirama nod and his older brother wilt. “If it wasn’t, I would gladly leave you to your

own… business." Whatever that was. He had long since learned to mostly stop pestering Hashirama about it or else he'd never get some peace and quiet. His older brother just tended to complicate things wherever he went, to label it neutrally. "Also, we'd be far too busy talking about your involuntary trip", Izuna cut in. "Can't expect to get back from the future and not tell about it."

Madara frowned ever so slightly. It was right, actually. Izuna was a nosy bastard -always had been- and he hadn't pestered him about it once, not truly. Instead he'd told Hashirama and him to get some sleep and when that had failed, put him to his own bed when he had come home, equally pissed off and sad. For him to refrain from questioning him all night, he would have been aware of the urgency of this… whatever it was going to be. "The Hokage-Office?", he asked, getting an affirmative nod by Tobirama, before he entered, making his way up the stairs, ignoring Tobirama's command of "Move it, Anija."

Not caring to wait for the epitome of failure that was Hashirama, Madara opened the door to the Hokage's office, not bothering to close it, as the others would be right behind him. For a moment he frowned as he saw the three women sitting at a large table that surely had been standing somewhere else when he had last been here. Their clothing spoke of civilians clearly coming from money as the cloth was richly woven and opulent. "Sakuya-hime."

"Madara-dono." At least she didn't use his clan-name, he noticed. Uchiha-dono had always been his bastard of a father, when it came to official business.

"Hokage-dono." Ah, Hashirama had made it, too. Without bothering to acknowledge him, Madara took a step aside and sat onto the outer right one of the chairs. At least that way, that idiot of a Senju wouldn't sit next to him.

"Sakuya-hime", Hashirama repeated, making for the seat next to him, the absolute moron, until Izuna cut him off, slipping onto the chair smoothly before he could. His shoulders slumped but he took the next seat nonetheless, having Tobirama sitting on the very left. "How wonderful of you to visit our village! I apologise for our absence, I didn't mean to cause offense."

"You never do and still it's all you're good for", Madara muttered, making his Kage slump in his chair, attempting to steal a bashful look at the man two seats away. "I'm so sorry! If we could just-" "I assume your visit is not without purpose", Madara cut in, not paying any attention to how the Hokage wilted even further in his seat, a picture of utter dejection. "Especially considering the security measures necessary to protect your travel."

For a moment, the women were silent, doubtlessly at least confused by the display of not-quite spouse-quarrel. Then, the princess spoke up. "We made the way on our own."

Immediately, Hashirama looked up. "You shouldn't", he chastised, as though he was any better, the irresponsible idiot. "The way is far too long and dangerous, even if you stayed on the main-routes for travel!"

The princess looked up, her usually rather pleasantly swung lips thinning. "We didn't stay on the main-routes", she answered. "It was too dangerous, we couldn't risk being found."

That was new information even for Tobirama, who frowned. “You would have gotten lost in the wilderness”, he deemed, and Sakuya nodded. “We stayed parallel to the routes”, she explained. “We could see the road but tried to stay hidden between the trees. One night outside the forest we didn’t set camp at all but walked on until we could hide between the trees again. We didn’t risk sleeping in the open.”

“That sounds like an arduous and dangerous travel”, Hashirama noted, now frowning in both, worry and reprove. “Why did you make the way here yourselves without any protection? If you had just sent a notice, we would have gladly accompanied you… I am surprised your father agreed to this dangerous undertake.”

Before the princess could answer, Madara huffed. “Stupid idiot”, he huffed -for what felt like at least one time too many today. “You wouldn’t have taken all these hardships if the Daimyo had known about your plans”, he noted. “Why did you sneak out of the castle and walk all these days to the village?”

Sakuya nodded, her dark hair flowing with the motion. “Father does not know I came here”, she said. “Or maybe he does by now but was too late to stop me, I don’t know. It took us eight days and we had already used up most of our supplies, when some of Konohagakure’s patrolling-shinobi found us, still a far way off the village, and escorted us the rest of the way.” Her lips thinned even further, now a hard line in her rather pretty face. Her eyes, as dark as her hair, stared on the table before she raised her head again, now a picture of determination. “Father is not with his own mind anymore”, she said, pointedly ignoring Hashirama’s mouth falling open in an absolute undignified manner. “A few months ago -I do not know when exactly he arrived, maybe half a year, maybe even more- a new consultant has taken place at my father’s side. I cannot tell you where he hails from or what he looks like, if not for the voice I wouldn’t even know whether it is a man or woman, for he keeps his face always hidden.”

She paused for a moment, before folding her hands on the table and calmly raising her eyes. Madara recognised the gesture as the slipping into politician roles Hashirama always spectacularly failed at. “Father has always worried about shinobi-clans becoming too independent”, she explained. “But since Konohagakure has been founded, he feared being overthrown by a force he had no resources of stopping. Your visit did not calm his worries in the slightest, not that I know what you spoke of.” One of her servants -Madara even thought he recognised her but he wasn’t certain- offered the princess a glass of water from seemingly out of thin air and she drunk, tilting the glass ever so slightly as to not stain anything. Bred and raised royalty, he deemed. If he hadn’t been respecting her for making it all the way from the Daimyo’s palace to the village in one piece by herself, he would have been revolted.

“But after the new consultant arrived, it became… worse. I do not even think he realised it, but soon all he would talk about -all he would think about- was how to stop Konohagakure from taking over Fire-Country as a whole. He wouldn’t listen to anyone else anymore, but to that man. I… I came to warn you about the upcoming war, but Tobirama-dono already informed me I was too late for that. I should have left sooner, but I am no kunoichi, nor could I ask anyone to fulfil the task for me. That consultant, he… he poisoned father’s mind until he couldn’t think of anything other than how to prevent Konohagakure’s coup. I was helpless to do anything but watch my father lose himself to those… advices, anyone who dared to

oppose got ridden off quickly, as soon as the idea had started to fester. But one day, I overheard how they were talking about having included another shinobi-village from the north into their plans… and Kikoru-dono from Uzushiogakure. I had known the Senju and the Uzumaki were close by blood, even though only the Senju ever worked for us directly, prior to the shared village." Her eyes hardened, now. "I had known something sinister had been brewing for months, unable to do anything about it. But when I heard talks of prevention, of annihilation and of-" Her gaze flickered to Madara, "And of *eyes*, I knew I had to do something. Anything. So I had Yukori and Hishimi" -She gestured at her two companions, maids, probably- "Prepare as many supplies as they could without raising suspicions. And when father was being… consulted… the next time, we escaped through the old guard quarters and made our way to Konohagakure, not knowing we would be too late to warn you."

Hashirama opened his mouth, probably to comfort, but once more Madara beat him to it. "You escaped from the Daimyo's palace and made it all the way to the village without getting caught by guards, torn apart by wildlife, mugged, or lost in the forest", he noted and when Sakuya didn't deign his statement worth an answer, he inclined his head ever so slightly, to make sure he would address all three of them equally. "You would make fine kunoichi, if you so choose."

Hashirama's mouth fell open. "You never called me that!"

The Uchiha patriarch's head turned ever so slightly and lifted a slender eye-brow at him. "Lest I missed something rather important, you aren't a women, Hashirama."

The Hokage spluttered. "Tha- That's not what I meant and you know it, I-"

"You told us you were able to catch the consultant's name", Tobirama cut in again. Why was it his brother who was the utter fool and even more, why did he hold the most important position within the village?!

If she was in any way disturbed by the display of utter uselessness that was the village's Hokage, Sakuya didn't show any of it. Instead, she nodded. "It only happened once, so I cannot be certain. But the name I heard father referring him to was Zetsu."

"I have never heard that name before", Tobirama said. "I hoped either of you might be able to recognise it."

Both men shook their heads in denial. "This is the first time I've ever heard it", Hashirama noted. "It might be fake, though." He turned back to Sakuya. "Did you get any glimpses of the man? Hair-colour, skin-colour, clothing-style?"

The princess shook her head. "All he ever wore was a black mantle and a bamboo-hat big enough to cover his entire figure. I would have no way of recognizing him on the streets."

Other than his moron of a Kage, Madara directly addressed Tobirama next to him, other than bothering the princess with questions she already had answered at least once when she had first spoken to their little brothers during their absence. "Any other clues?"

Tobirama shook his head. “None”, he answered. “I haven’t yet spread the information, bringing you back took priority.”

“I know I don’t need to spell it out for you”, and by *you* he meant Madara, since Izuna was in no way certain it would also apply to Hashirama, “But whoever that Zetsu-person is, is either responsible or a direct link to whomever responsible for turning Kumogakure and Uzushio - and, apparently, the Daimyo- against us.”

“We only saw a fraction of Uzushio on the battlefield”, Tobirama said, “So we can hope that not all Uzumaki supported Kikoru in his plans to annihilate us for whatever reason beyond this scheme of us overthrowing Fire-Country.”

Madara frowned, absently tapping onto the table with his right hand. “You all know that before the battle started”, he relapsed, “The Kumo-shinobi demanded my eyes as the price for peace.” Hashirama stiffened next to him. “We would never-” “Even back then”, Madara waltzed on, ignoring his Kage once again, “It seemed… staged, somehow. He knew Hashirama would decline. The only reason he demanded was to be able to have a reason to call war for.”

Izuna frowned, as well, the expression eerily similar to his older brother’s. “You mean Hashirama declining that… offer… was only the last excuse for war”, he noted, making his older brother nod. “It was never about my eyes, those were just a ruse to set up Hashirama as the war-monger for declining the peace-offering.”

“Zetsu would talk about eyes.” Sakuya, again. “I do not know which ones, but father would tell me, time and time again, how the Uchiha’s eyes were the root of evil, that they had forced the Senju to abandon their loyalty to us.” Her brows furrowed tightly, she looked at them again. “I once overheard them talking about them, father claiming he would squash them underneath his boot” Hashirama bristled and interestingly, one of her maidens stared at him, as though she felt the lashes of his chakra not quite potent enough to make it to the surface. “Zetsu… berated him.” She pulled the word long, as though she wasn’t certain it was the right one to use. “I did not hear it at length, I needed to pretend to tend to my flowers. But I do know he made it very clear the eyes had to be undamaged. I did not hear the reason, though I know he gave it, as I saw father nod, a while after. But for all his usual gentle prodding and whispered advices, the man quite strongly opposed the idea of destroying those eyes… and considering the current context, I can only assume he was referring to yours, Madara-dono.”

“He won’t get them.”

“Hashirama, don’t be-” The ground underneath him cracked, as did the walls, and the Shoudaime’s pupils were barely visible in the sudden darkness of his eyes, his teeth grit and his nostrils heaving in fury, as the table’s edge splintered underneath his fingers. Blood-red vines wrapped around Madara’s shins, and green ones between the fingers of his right hand still on the table after his finger-tapping.

The left of the poor maidens squeaked.

“I like my eyes just fine where they are”, Madara noted. “But if you don’t take those roots off of me right now, Hashirama, I will tear out your fingers. Don’t you touch me after last night.”

If he heard Izuna groan next to him, the blame entirely being pointed at the stupid God of Shinobi and his inability to use his single brain-cell whenever it came to emotions.

Stupid idiot.

Chapter End Notes

What I wanted to write in this chapter: Hashirama fucking.
What I got to write in this chapter: Hashirama fucking up.
Stupid brain, never gets things quite right.

Chapter 54

Chapter Summary

Couple-Therapy.
Except neither of them ever said they're a couple, now that the author thinks about it.

Chapter Notes

The good news: After a BIG writer's block -so big, I couldn't even *read* anything Naruto-related- I managed to actually write this chapter.
The bad news: I hate this chapter, it's a mess because I sometimes didn't manage to write more than two sentences before having to give up again.

“I am aware, my warning was too late and therefore meaningless and the information I am able to provide is sparse.” Hands still perfectly clasped in front of her, the princess didn’t lower her gaze, a picture of regal grace. “Nevertheless, I would ask for refuge within the village. If not for me, at least for my handmaids, who accompanied me, despite the unfavourable circumstances.”

Hashirama blinked, mouth still half-way opened to argue with Madara, the raven’s expression utterly unimpressed by his Kage, and turned back to face the three women on the table’s opposite side. “Of course you can- Tobirama! Did you want to- We can’t just send them back! Not after all they’ve done for us!”

Ignoring his older brother, Tobirama faced the princess. “When I asked you to repeat your observations to the Hokage, I didn’t imply for your welcome to expire after”, he said, frowning slightly. “I should have made myself clear. Apologies.”

“Besides”, Madara mused, “Your information helped us a great deal. I had assumed, we only had Kumogakure and Uzushio against us… to learn that the Daimyo is included, as well, is sensitive information.” It was the only logical conclusion. The odds of some ambassador appearing out of nowhere, turning the Daimyo against Konohagakure and demanding for his eyes while an absolutely unrelated army of shinobi declared war on them after demanding the exact same were so slim they could be utterly ignored. It was strange, to suddenly deal with this again, after all that had happened right after the battle… In that shattered, wrong version of Konohagakure with Hashirama’s grand-daughter nearly unwillingly in charge and the knowledge of his own death at the hands of- “If the Daimyo is involved, money is barely an

issue for our opponents", he waltzed on, unwilling to ponder on the thought. "We managed to force Kumogakure and the Uzumaki into retreat", at least that was what Tobirama had reported, "But we cannot risk them re-grouping."

Next to him, Izuna leaned back in his chair, arms crossed. "Besides, we still don't know what they have done to Matatabi… and if they are able to repeat whatever they did to her." Losing Two-Tails had hit all of them, but especially Hashirama and Madara. They had gotten close, since she had started to live close to Konoha, a familiar presence to the people of their village surprisingly soon -or maybe not so surprising. After all, the people of Konoha were used to strange developments, by now. But… There were eight more Tailed Beasts and whatever had happened to Matatabi, they couldn't risk it repeating!

"After the two of you disappeared", Tobirama explained, "We retreated our forces, as well. Mito's sources -even though she is not absolutely certain about their reliability- claims, the enemy didn't re-locate to Uzushio. That either leaves Hidden Cloud or… the Daimyo's castle."

Crossing his arms, Madara nodded, brows drawn together in thought. "There aren't many possible locations for retreat with that high of a man-number", he noted. "Kumogakure would be that far too obvious option, I doubt they would have taken a risk that big." He turned to Tobirama. "You were able to sense anything?" Hashirama's younger brother was as good a sensor as Madara and an entire army was hard to miss, after all. Unfortunately -and predictively- Tobirama shook his head. "I assume the Uzumaki sealed their location", he answered and once again, Madara nodded. Inconvenient but not unexpected. "We need to act fast", he noted. "The more time we allow our enemies to re-group, the worse the results. And…" His hands balled into fists, tightly locked under his arms, "We need to get hold of those Uzumaki. I *will* find out what they did to Matatabi."

"I do not wish to be intrusive." It was Sakuya who spoke up again, her face carefully composed as always, perfectly polite. The perfect politician. "But I fear I am unaware of necessary context to grasp the full picture."

"So are we", Tobirama answered, while his older brother's lips thinned. "What is there to misunderstand", Hashirama asked, his tone unusual rough. "This… Zetsu wants Madara's eyes! But he won't get them." His fingers tightened, the table cracking underneath them. "Not while I still breathe", he swore.

"May I learn the reason?"

Hashirama frowned. "You can't assume we would just… give away Madara's eyes", he protested, making the Uchiha in question roll said eyes. "She asked why he would want my eyes, not why you oppose handing them over, you moron."

The Hokage blinked, visibly deflating. "Oh."

"I am *this* close", Madara gave back, his voice a picture of perfect calm; the strange opposition of Hashirama in an even stranger swift from usual, "To kicking you right out of your own office in the most literal way, shit-head."

And just like that, Hashirama deflated even further. “I…”

“And people still think he’s in charge here.” Izuna’s voice was as unimpressed as ever, not much missing and he would be inspecting his nails in boredom just to add to the picture. Why did he out of all people had to be one of the mature ones? Being mature sucked all kinds of ways and only a few of them were pleasant.

“Nobody thinks that”, Tobirama chuffed. “At least not after having talked to you for more than three minutes.”

Merely showing polite interest, princess Sakuya watched the conversation, not missing as much as one single motion. It was of utter importance to know who was in charge, more than ever in her current, rather delicate, situation. The Hokage was the one leading this shinobi-village, all decisions ran through him. Except puppet-rulers were nothing unheard of in politics -and apparently, that also went for shinobi ones, which would made it just as much- “Do not be mistaken.” Keeping her face open and calm took no effort; it was a skill he had been raised to possess. She turned to the Uchiha patriarch. “Hashirama *is* the actual head of this village”, he told her, making her refrain from blinking in surprise at having her pondering called out so obviously. “And he is so for a reason. Except when he is a fucking dumb-” “Ma-” “Brain-dead-” “I don’t-“ *“Shit head.”* “Madara!”

“Hah-” He squirmed in his lover’s hold, the Shoudaime’s arms unbreakable bars, keeping both, him inside and the entire rest of the world out. “Don’t you leave”, the God of Shinobi murmured. His breath was warm, as everything was about him, always warmer than Madara, who despite his chakra affinition always ran slightly cooler than average.

A battle-roughed, large palm slid over his chest, settling on his stomach and he could hear Hashirama hum in discontent. He wanted to be annoyed; why did the Hokage always have to bring up that one issue again, but was stopped when the other hand’s thump brushed against his nipple. Snarling, Madara bared his teeth at him. How dare that stupid idiot bring up the same issue every single time?! The Uchiha was well aware of his physical shortcomings. The last thing he needed was his lover of all people to bring it up for the umpteenth time! He attempted to free himself but Hashirama’s arms had wrapped tightly around him, not allowing him to build up enough momentum to break the hold -and even if he had been, Madara was not entirely certain, he would have been successful. Hashirama was a beast of power; there wasn’t much -if anything at all- able to withstand him, if he so chose.

As always, the thought made his lower half throb with arousal.

Hashirama was the strongest known being in all the lands; even the other Kage paled in comparison to him, the Tailed Beats, the entire army they had fought against, if he hadn’t been so worries about his… their *people. A behemoth, held in place merely by- he sucked in a mouth of air, when two fingers at the same time pressed against his entrance, not waiting for*

the tight ring of muscle to loosen, forcing entrance anyhow. His free arm tightened even further, pressing Madara's own arms against him, and he snarled once more at the utter decency.

He could feel Hashirama slipping inside him, hard and throbbing and…

With just another snarl, he forced himself to wake up, tearing off the vines creeping over him. He ignored the pain in his nipples as he ripped off those that had latched there, the skin bruising underneath their resistance. The one inside him were actually three, he found. It didn't matter, as he burned them anyway, before dragging the remains out of him (*not* a pleasurable experience in the most literal sense).

His whole room was plant-infested.

Roots and vines crept all over the floor, the chair wasn't even recognisable anymore, his walls bent, his shelves gnarled and deformed, his- *"HASHIRAMA!"*

He didn't even care to try opening the door, it was unsalvageable. Better burn it right away.

Not bothering with another break, he stalked across the house, throwing open the main-door. "You *disgusting*-"

The Shoudaime jerked at his spot in front of his porch, immediately awake as any battle-hardened shinobi would. "What is it?"

Madara could nearly feel the steam rising off of him, the ground churning underneath his feet. "You made it damn clear you don't want me in your wakened mind", the Uchiha bellowed. "So don't you dare trying to in your sleep!"

For one, long moment, all Hashirama could do was stare. There was plant-life *everywhere*. Roots and vines crept forward, not towards him, but towards the Uchiha clanheads' house, pressing through every crack they could find, right to- He blinked numbly.

Right to Madara's bedroom.

"I'm sorry."

Apparently, it was the wrong thing to say because Madara's onyx eyes flashed in fury and he didn't have enough time to get to his feet, before the Uchiha kicked him right into his side, except- "I am not entirely beneath learning", the Hokage remarked. He had been thrashed around enough by his lover by now to know he favoured his stronger, left leg and aimed at the equal side of him… and wasn't that some strange knowledge, he mused, as the ground cracked underneath him, absorbing the kick he had just blocked with his forearm. Immediately, his face became pleading again. "Can we *please* talk about it?"

As if to mock his words, the Uchiha snarled right in his face. "You've made your point clear. Fuck off."

"No."

“Fuck. Off!”

“No.” Still the same, pleasant tone.

“Fine.” Hashirama blinked. What- “Then stay *here*!”

And just like that, Madara disappeared and the Shoudaime cursed. Madara wasn’t one to retreat… he would fight his battles to the very end, no matter the cost. If he had chosen to do so now, it meant… yes, what did it mean? Already, muscle-memory had sprung to life, having his body stand up and turn to where his stubborn Uchiha had leaped off to.

He didn’t know what it meant. And they *would talk about it*! His father had always told him, talking did no good, petty words wouldn’t help and merely action would truly end conflict.

Ironic, Hashirama decided, as he leaped forward, following Madara’s path across the Uchiha district and then outside the village. Action had always, always fuelled their conflict, generations of shinobi in an ever-lasting war. What had ended it, finally, was talking. Talking with that wild, raven-haired boy about dreams and brothers and their perfect village, about that senseless ever-lasting war.

With a skittering stop, he changed directions, following Madara across the last houses-rooves and out of the village, from where the trees happily gloated over the Uchiha’s presence. “Madara! Wait!”

He didn’t exactly hear the Uchiha’s reply, but was pretty certain that it was a bunch of insults. Most of them about his brain, probably -or, more correctly, its absence. Around them, the trees shuddered, their branches and roots reaching out to the Uchiha, making him evade their grasp. “If you don’t stop, I’ll just have to follow you all the way across Fire-Country”, he called, trying to gain some on Madara, but as usual, couldn’t quite match the Uchiha’s speed. The raven was all slender limbs and movement, making it nearly impossible for Hashirama’s muscled -heavier- form to keep up with him. “I *will*, Madara”, he threatened. “Don’t doubt me!”

Another moment passed and then, Madara stopped as suddenly as he had bolted off and swirled around, leaping at Hashirama with the same deadly speed. Hashirama’s eyes didn’t even have time to widen, before he ducked, dodging the kunai aiming for his throat.

It wasn’t lethal, he knew it wasn’t. The blade didn’t aim for his aorta and even if it did, he had little doubt he would be able to heal such a wound; Madara himself had told him of his suspicion how nothing less of decapitation would succeed in actually killing him. (“And that only because your body wouldn’t even realise it needs a brain for survival. Not that it’s much use in its current connected state either, now that I think about it.”)

Unfortunately, he didn’t quite manage to dodge the same blade again as Madara used the movement to fling it right at his chest. Hashirama turned to grasp the raven’s arm, utterly ignoring his own defence. The kunai sunk into his left pectoral, nearly all the way to the hilt, scratching his lung and having blood drip inside, as the cloth around it got drenched in red, as well.

“Are you done?”

“Me?” Hashirama could nearly feel his face melting, considering how little was missing for Madara to spit fire right into his face without even having to cast a single jutsu. “*Me?!*” Oh, dear. “You fucked that Uzumaki and fathered a child”, this wasn’t- “You killed me”, they hadn’t- “I decided to trust you”, Yes, but- “And you ask if *I* am done?!”

“Madara-” “Don’t you *dare*-”

A warm mouth pressed onto his, efficiently interrupting Madara’s angry tirade before it could get proper volume. Kami, why did his Uchiha have to be so very complicated?! It was as though he didn’t even try solving their current issue in any reasonable way at all! So much had happened over the last few days; everything had been uprooted twice all over. And Madara still didn’t want to talk about it; refused to even acknowledge there was a need to do so, despite the soul-shattering revelations that had been forced upon them, one right after the other and every next one worse than the previous. But if he at least stopped yelling, maybe they could- blood flooded his mouth and detachedly, he realised Madara had bitten his tongue deeply, nearly severing the muscle.

Drawing back, the Uchiha spat a glob of blood to the ground; immediately, blackberry bushes started twisting out of the soaked spot of soil. “I asked you”, Madara growled, “To make it up to me” -*It*, Hashirama couldn’t help but notice, was a rather absurdly little word for all the crushing revelations it encompassed- “And you denied me.” Ah, Hashirama thought. But he hadn’t. Or had he? Madara had never been a shining example of emotional stability. Hashirama would trust Madara with his life in a heart-beat… but he didn’t trust him with Madara’s own, for damn good reasons. And yet, all he had wanted was to touch Madara, bask in his intimacy and trust, but how did it matter if- “I cannot look at myself in the mirror anymore. How could I ask something that much more intimidate from you?”

The words were out before Hashirama could really think about them, far too late to weight them before speaking, and slightly slurred. His tongue was still sore. And yet, it was the truth. He just couldn’t bear looking at himself, looking at the man who had done… *it*. And he had no idea how much worse Madara felt, since the raven right out refused to talk about it! “I will not forgive myself until I perish on the battle-field one day”, the Shoudaime noted. “Asking you for forgiveness would be the highest blasphemy.”

“And who”, ah, Hashirama noted. The hissing was back, “Do you think you are for daring to negate my decisions like that?”

“I broke your trust in the worst possible way.” Oh, how it hurt to say those words, Hashirama thought. It had been so, so hard to gain that trust in the first place, after all. Madara wasn’t too good with second chances. “We needed to talk about it, about you, *us*-“

“*You*”, the Uchiha’s voice was uncharacteristically cold, “Needed to talk about it. *I* just needed to know I could still trust you, to feel you, *all* of you, to be certain that we are *us*, not *them*.” Those *other* Senju Hashirama and Uchiha Madara. “But you declined. You thought you knew better, that it was for the best. Just, as I’m sure, *that* Senju Hashirama thought he knew better. That it was for the best, when he-” That it was for the best to kill Madara, the other Madara, not that it mattered. That he knew better, no matter what he had- The ground

crunched, as the God of Shinobi fell to his knees. The other Hashirama, the other him, would have been convinced of the same: That it was for the best.

How could it ever be?

“I am sorry.”

He had said it, over and over again, and been rebuffed every single time. And yet- “We’re good.”

Hashirama blinked. Two words. Just two oh so simple words and somehow, the world’s weight was put off of his shoulders. “Do you still want to-” “I still want you to fuck my brains out”, Madara confirmed. “Except not right now. I’m not in the mood.”

And for once, the Shoudaime didn’t know whether to be relieved or disappointed by that. But it didn’t matter that much, anyways because the words still resonated in his mind. *We’re good.*

They would be. Eventually.

Chapter 55

Chapter Summary

In which the auhor's writer's block was so bad she can't even come up with a summary. I've been trying for 15 minutes.

Chapter Notes

To anyone who still might read this:

I have no excuse. Absolutely none.
I had the worst writer's block I've ever experienced and it got so bad I decided to write nothing at all for a whole month, hoping it'd get better. I couldn't even READ anything HashiMada related for the most part! AND: I couldn't even write the porn that was supposed to fill half of this chapter! And if my filthy butt can't even write mokuton-tentacle sex, things are going south. I couldn't even re-read the chapter more than once without getting stuck.
But: I managed to work my way back to the main-plot and now I have a goal! So I really hope that helps. Eyes on target.

(Also: I never even planed for this and I don't think I'll be able to include it into the main story, but... I'm considering to write an "Izuna gets his wish"-OS but I'm not sure if you'd even be interested in which is probably the weirdest "pairing" in this whole fandom. So let me know?)

The trees had straightened their drooping branches, that incredibly ugly bush across the street was just as ugly as always except its leaves had stopped turning yellow and the lawn had grown so much it had straight out swallowed the pathway, which only left one conclusion.
“Hashirama managed to get his head out of his ass”, Izuna noted.

“Good”, Tobirama answered, not raising his head from the map he was studying. “That means you can leave and sleep at your own house again.”

Following Tobirama’s example, Izuna also didn’t even raise his head from his second bowl of… whatever it was, half of it consisting of chilis, as he answered. “You do realise I will sleep here even more because I have absolutely no intention of being in the same house your brother and mine will make up with each other, probably quite energetically?”

“Mito sealed off the entire place”, Tobirama answered, marking something on his map Izuna couldn’t quite make out due to being far too busy with picking the fried meat chunks out of his food.

“In that case, you can use my futon and sleep in my room while I’m staying here”, the Uchiha remarked, disappointedly fishing the last small piece of meat out of his bowl, setting the left-over rice aside. A strange concept… to set food aside or even worse, to *throw it away*. All his life, he -all of the Uchiha- had to make do with what little they had; spoiling even a grain of rice would have been unthinkable, let alone a quarter-full bowl. He had had entire meals with less than this and he knew that more often than not, Madara had shared his own meagre portion with him.

He grabbed the bowl again, slowly working his way through the rest of rice. “So, we’re going for the direct approach?”

For a few moments, Tobirama didn’t answer, still staring at his map of the north border of fire country. “As lacklustre as it is, stealth would be unnecessary in the best case and contra-productive in the worst”, he answered, his lips thinning in distaste. “Every day we stall is another day for our enemy to prepare. We were able to deal with their first attempt -we would have overthrown their forces, had it not been for that unfortunate incident.”

Izuna snorted. Yes, that was one way to describe it. “Give them today to work their issues out”, he advised, setting aside the now empty bowl. “We’ll need that for preparation, anyhow. We still need to consider whom we’ll assign to Sakuya-hime, too.” Their older brothers were both out of the question, as were Izuna himself or anyone else of their questionable science-quartet. Nevertheless, at least two capable shinobi would have to stay behind to be able to protect the princess, additionally to those who would stay behind to secure the village during the upcoming battle. One couldn’t just leave the village unattended while going to battle, not in generations of bloody clan-wars or in… whatever this was.

Tobirama huffed. “If you wouldn’t-” The door opening interrupted him and he Izuna rose a slim black brow, before calling: “Hashirama, you better get your tanned arse back to my brother or I’ll drag you there myself.”

Steps closed in, entering the kitchen a few moments later. “Regardless of your disappointment, I will not enter your brother’s house right now”, Kakuzu drawled, making Izuna grin at him. “I nevertheless wouldn’t mind dragging your tanned ass *somewhere*”, the Uchiha purred, making the assassin merely move his eyes into his direction without even bothering to turn his head. “Trying to compensate some missing tan, paper-skin?”, he drawled.

“More like trying to compensate some missing cock between my ass-checks.”

“Seems I have all the advantages, then.”

“And what do you-” “Would the both of you cut it out it out as long as you’re in my fucking house”, Tobirama bellowed, eyebrows twitching. Izuna sighed. “Not much fucking happening in this house, unfortunately”, Izuna huffed, making Kakuzu shrug. “Not with that attitude.” “Wha-” *“Cut it out!”*

Patronisingly, Izuna patted Tobirama's shoulder. "No need to be jealous, Tobes."

Tobirama would kill them. First, he would finalise their approach onto the enemy forces, then he would kill them. Starting with Izuna because he was damn certain *that little gremlin*- The front door opened for the second time and Tobirama resisted the urge to throw something. Preferably Izuna out of the window.

I didn't take long for the newcomer to join them in the kitchen, dragging the pot on the stove closer for inspection and huffing, as it turned out to be empty. Izuna shrugged, unapologizing. "Sorry, I already took the scraps."

"Shame on you", Mito noted, before taking a seat at the table, leaving the last one for Kakuzu who was still leaning on the stove while Tobirama had already clustered the whole table with papers, Izuna sitting on the opposite side. "I have news", she proclaimed.

Tobirama pinched the bridge of his nose, forcing down an unhelpful comment. Unlike *some* people in the room, Mito was actually progressive and didn't merely intend to rip apart the last of his nerves. And if she took the trouble to get here, instead of waiting to their next meeting (which was right after noon in the office; why were all of them in his house of all places?!), it had been worth the trouble.

"None of the Uzumaki returned to Uzushiogakure after the battle."

And, there it was. Tobirama frowned. "Are you certain?"

Mito nodded. "As much as I can be. My source stayed behind in Uzushio when the rest of us left the village."

Kakuzu lifted a pitch-black eyebrow. "So you installed a spy", he noted, making Mito frown. "I doubt she would agree with the title", she argued. "She stayed behind to keep an eye on the village's development, in case the tides would turn favourable towards us again -but she also didn't want to leave her family behind; none but her were willing to leave. It's fortunate we established communication channels prior to the escalation because apparently, Uzushiogakure has been closed off from all further contact. We weren't able to talk too long, anyhow, but she was able to tell me none of the Uzumaki who left prior to the battle returned. Of course, we can't rule out secrecy on their part, but it seems irrational."

"They're Uzumaki", Izuna huffed. "Irrational is their middle name."

"Takes one to know one, *Uchiha*."

Unabashedly, Izuna grinned. "Touché."

Mito didn't even deign that with an answer, instead going back to business without missing another beat. "I also finished modulating the princess' rooms sealing."

Izuna blinked. "You did what to the what?"

"You were busy not paying attention when we talked about it", Kakuzu answered, not even caring to explain further. Tobirama still didn't even deign him with looking up from his maps

and so it was Mito herself, who finally took pity on him. “I sealed off the rooms Sakuya-hime and her maidens are currently occupying, as soon as they made they decided to stay. No doubt their absence at the palace has already been noticed during their travel here. The seals prevented them from being discovered by long-range techniques, but wouldn’t have hold off much if someone even half-way adapted in fūinjutsu infiltrated the village.” She hadn’t even stopped talking when she had opened the cupboards, searching for food, and now only did so to take a hearty bite out of a mochi, humming pleasantly. “We all know there’s a high possibility of something happening in the village, as soon as we’re gone tomorrow. The women have supplies for several days by now and if they don’t leave the rooms, they should be untraceable -at least as long as nobody specifically attempts to track the seals and then proceeds to break them.”

Kakuzu crossed his arms. “How long will they hold, if somebody does?”

Mito shrugged, eating another mochi, not bothering with it coating her perfect lipstick. “A couple of hours, if it’s my father. If it’s anyone else… a couple of days.”

Huh.

Maybe Izuna really should have paid attention at the last meeting.

“Why?”

Madara quirked a finely drawn brow at him. “Do us both a favour and specify.” Really, mere minutes had passed after Hashirama had finally managed to do something right for once and now he was all too busy being a moron again.

The Shoudaime frowned before meeting Madara’s eyes -more cautious than usual, the Uchiha noted. Hashirama was suicidal eager to meet his eyes, far too trusting considering the power a single glance was able to uphold, even on the God of Shinobi. “Why did you accept it?”, he asked. “My apology, I mean. I stopped counting how many times I already did but why-” Madara’s sigh interrupted him. “You really are a nitwit”, the raven told him, not even trying to soften the blow, letting it sink in for a moment, before answering his question.

“I accepted your apology, you idiot, because this was the first time you actually understood what you were apologising for.” He crossed his arms, his gaze heating up into a glare. “All you cared for was whining about how sorry you’d been. I don’t give a shit about that, Hashirama, if you don’t even know what you’re sorry *about* other than your own sad ass!”

A moment passed and the revelation settled. Then another. “But”, the Shoudaime argued, “I-” “You might want to re-consider whatever you’re about to say”, Madara cut in smoothly, “Because while I don’t really *want* to be pissed at you, I won’t-” “Alright, alright!” Holding his hands up patronisingly, Hashirama cut in what might have developed into another rant. “We’re good. Got it, won’t ask again.” Then, his gaze turned hopeful. “Do you want to-” “Hashirama, exactly what makes you assume I’ll want your plant-based dick right after-”

“Train?”, the Shoudaime ended weakly, making the Uchiha blink. “Train? Why won’t- it’s not-“ He huffed at himself, starting anew. “We’ll probably move against Kumogakure tomorrow. Do you really think, right now is the best idea?”

“It could be our last change. After all, we might die tomorrow.”

Madara blinked. Once. Twice. Then, he rolled his eyes. “We didn’t know about their weapons and tactics. Didn’t matter, we still would have crushed them, given just a little more time. Last time, they had the opportunity to prepare and lost. This time, they won’t even have that.” Not only because of the tactical advantage but also because of Matatabi. “We can’t let them do to the others whatever they did to Matatabi”, Hashirama confirmed. He hadn’t had the time and space to properly mourn her, yet, but he would. He had always allowed to feel himself in full force, no matter whether it was joy, pride or sadness, even if he often had to so in secret as a child. Such feelings weren’t proper for a shinobi, least of all allowing himself to cry for a loved one.

He had always taken the time to weep his losses, never allowing himself to be dulled by its frequency, but he had long since learned to keep those feelings close, letting them run freely in the right moments, instead of having them block his mentality. It hadn’t always worked, of course, and pondering about it now merely made it worse.

He wanted to mourn, wanted to cry. He had never had a sister (neither did Madara. Strange, he mused. What were the chances with a total of seven siblings?) and while he had not loved Matatabi as one, he was all too aware he had been on his way of doing so.

He didn’t even know whether that made it better or worse, because now, he would never get the possibility to do so. “Let’s go”, he offered, already turning around.

“I don’t think so.”

Hashirama sighed. He had really hoped for some- “We’re going home.”

He blinked dumbly. “What?”

“We’re going home”, Madara repeated. “Hurry up before I change my mind and you stay outside again.”

Somewhere, not too far away, a woman cackled, the deep lines around her eyes deepening even further. “They’re on it, again.”

Not even bothering to ask how she might be aware of it, neither of the other four people even looked up from their cards. Makoto had an unsettling -or rather, amusing and indeed very helpful- moron-sensor. So far, it hadn’t failed her yet. “Pay up, Sarana. It didn’t even take them three days.”

The Uchiha elder huffed, taking some coins out of her purse. “Madara is getting soft.” Not bothering to answer his fellow elder, Itsuko shifted through his cards, playing a trump and setting aside the stack to start a new one, getting rid of his weakest card.

“Nothing that Uchiha is getting right now is soft”, Hibiko cackled, throwing in a card of her own.

When the snickering had stopped, a few rounds were played in near silence before: “It’s just a matter of time until Hashirama embarrasses himself again.”

“Two months, staring tomorrow.”

“Two whole months? Did something hatch in your tea and crawled in your brain to die? Three weeks it is.”

“Akiyama, are you writing this down?”

“Of course I do.”

Madara was not sleeping yet, but it was only a matter of minutes, by now.

Deep, even breaths -no rattle, no wetness, just his lungs filling and deflating, again and again in that soothing rhythm that *should* be entirely normal but for him would never cease to be wonderful.

“I can hear you thinking.”

Madara’s words were barely understandable, muddled by sleep, even though it was only early afternoon. Hashirama smiled. “Don’t you always insists I don’t do that?”

A huff, so quiet Hashirama nearly didn’t hear it. “’m not ‘wake enough to do it for you”, the Uchiha muttered, slumping even further when Hashirama softly combed through his raven hair with his fingers. It was a tiny edge between untangling the strands or pulling them, potentially making them even worse than before.

Thankfully, it was a skill he had long since perfected.

A single, pitch-black eye slid open, peeking at him with a tiredness that had a bolt of… pride rush through Hashirama. There were few times, Madara was compliant; far too unruly and sharp-tongued as the Uchiha was. But at these times, he was. And the pride of knowing that *he* was responsible for it was far superior to any other battle won, any- “Y’fucked me into oblivion, ‘s no reason to be smug”, Madara muttered, the last words barely even comprehendible. Hashirama couldn’t help but chuckle, kissing the unruly black hair underneath his chin. “Whatever you say, love.”

It was strange, he mused, when Madara didn't answer, finally having lost the battle against sleep. He had had bed-partners before. During the war, battles were brutal and bodily release were the very few indulges they could take -even though Hashirama hadn't been able to do so with fellow shinobi; there were quite a lot of people in his clan who wouldn't have taken lightly on him doing such, instead of taking a kunoichi to bed.

Point was, he had had needs and they had been taken care of -more or less; mostly less, if he was honest with himself. But… it had always been once. Before Madara, there had never been that ~~desire~~ ~~need~~ ability to go again, to just not have enough. It… everything… was just so much different with Madara and he couldn't help but wonder whether it was the same for the Uchiha, too.

The raven shifted in his arms, huffing, and Hashirama couldn't help but smile. He could only hope it was just as different for Madara, as it was for himself. After all-

He could hear his thoughts coming to a screeching stop.

They had never really talked about it.

He had had bed-partners before and since it didn't seem to matter to Madara, Hashirama had made a point not to care about Madara's sexual past, either.

Except…

Except he had always just assumed *there was one*.

The hand soothing the Uchiha's hair stopped in its tracks and he felt himself stare absently on the opposing wall.

What if there was none?

What if he had touched Madara like he did, had taken what he did, when all the while, the raven hadn't even had the possibility to experience a partner who wasn't the abomination he was? What if-

"St'p it", the Uchiha muttered and it took Hashirama a moment to realise that of course being the Sensor he was and lying right onto his chest, Madara was bound to feel his chakra curling underneath his skin. The raven grunted in annoyance as it curled even tighter for a moment, before Hashirama exhaled a deep breath, forcing it to relax alongside his muscles. "Sorry", he murmured, not even getting a verbal answer aside from an a grumble.

A moment passed.

Another.

Then a third.

… "Madara?"

The raven didn't even care to hide his unhappiness about being disturbed *again*. "Wh't?"

“I… Did you ever, before-”

No answer.

“Sleep with someone?”

Hashirama watched in astonishment as the Uchiha’s perfect slender nose (had it never been broken?) wrinkled at the question, as though he had just been asked the secrets of the universe.

And then he fell back to sleep, his breaths deep and calm one more.

“Madara…? Madara!”

Chapter 56

Chapter Summary

In which Madara has a no good, very bad day.
(He'll make sure those responsible will have an even worse one).

Chapter Notes

I'll just... drop this here and crawl back into my hole.

(I'm moving in three days, starting my first non-university related job after graduation.
So...
Anyone of you folks living near Frankfurt?)

It was eerie, how quiet hundreds of shinobi could be, bolting through the trees of Fire-Country, steadily heading north-east. The rustle of cloth was nearly undistinguishable from that of the tree leaves hissing in the wind, the tapping of shoes on the branches just as loud as those branches themselves when scratching across the bark. The calm of the Shoudaime's chakra-ocean rippled, unnoticeable to anyone but Madara himself, a promise of the hurricane it might unleash.

The God of Shinobi halted his next step, unnoticeable, too, to anyone but Madara himself. The raven refrained from rolling his eyes, if barely. It was ridiculous, really. Right from the start, Hashirama had insisted in keeping perfect pace with him, not a single step… not even half of one… in front of him.

Madara had stopped, having gotten tired of this whole stupid charade. Hashirama had stopped. The whole army of their forces had come into a stop behind him. He had resumed travelling, Hashirama right next to him, taking a step half as long on occasion, a second one just slightly longer on another.

Madara had stopped, *again*. Hashirama had stopped. The whole army had stopped.

Madara had yelled. Hashirama had been quiet. The whole *stupid* army had been quiet.

"I am the Hokage", Hashirama had agreed. "And I *do* lead the village." "Then why, you stupid brain-dead-" "But first of all, I am your partner. And your equal."

Madara had blinked. Opened his mouth. Blinked again. “What does that even have to do with anything?!”

Hashirama had looked at him and that cursed patience of his could fill an entire forest.

Fortunately, Tobirama’s couldn’t.

“If you don’t get moving *right now*, I will make you”, the younger Senju had bellowed, his eye twitching in a rather familiar manner.

“Somehow, doing war was easier when it was just us”, Izuna noted and this time, Tobirama’s brow twitched violently. But before he could answer (or explode into a cloud of boiling water), Madara resumed his pace.

Next to him, Hashirama did, as well.

Behind them, their army followed.

Since none of them knew whether the rest of Kumogakure’s army was currently stationed at the village itself or the Daimyo’s castle (even though the latter seemed more likely), they couldn’t travel north straight. Instead, they were forced to tend west, getting as close to the Daimyo’s palace as possible for Mito to discern sealings placed to hide chakra-signatures from sensors – because if they hadn’t, Madara would have known their location as soon as he put his mind to it.

They would move as close to the castle as they dared (with Izuna probably getting Mito even closer, the little weasel) and if nothing would be brought forth, they’d make a beeline north-east again, right at Lighting country’s shinobi village.

“I wish there was a different way”, the Shoudaime Hokage mourned quietly, regretting yet undoubting the only possible outcome once they had located the enemy’s forces.

“There might be one.”

Hashirama blinked, not having expected Madara of all people to agree with him. “Once this is settled”, the Uchiha cautioned, keeping his gaze forward stubbornly, “You can make certain this is the last time this has to happen. There is no doubt this… dispute” his face soured at the word, certain it was far too weak to describe what happened and yet at the same time, it wasn’t war. He had experienced war; they all had. War was ugly, war was dead children and blood-soaked mud, war was hatred and mindless slaughter.

Whatever this was, it wasn’t war.

Maybe it was murder, he considered, thinking of Matatabi and pushing down the thought before it was allowed to take up too much of his mind. Maybe it was… “Treachery”, he

decided, finally. Treachery on what could have been; the peace Hashirama had worked tirelessly to achieve.

This wasn't war. It was treachery. And it would be dealt with.

This was Hashirama's dream at stake; the dream of a child with an awful haircut and ears too big, of a child who had dreamed of other children's safety. And… "Hn."

Not stopping, Hashirama turned towards him. "What is it?"

And a child with unruly black hair who had, even back then, watched the brown haired boy in amazement as he had spoken the words and dreams he himself had never dared to whisper.

Madara could feel his lips curl upwards ever so slightly. "Nothing."

For yet another moment, Hashirama watched him curiously, probably hoping for an elaboration, before he faced the path in front of them, again. They wouldn't be able to head this way much longer; soon they would have to decide whether to aim east, closer towards the Daimyo's palace, or correct their path, aiming east towards Lightning Country. For a moment, the idea of splitting their forces crossed him; Madara was a Sensor strong enough to- "Wait."

It wasn't Mito who had asked but Takeru: An Uzumaki who, even though young, had specialised in locating seals. Apparently, he was utterly ungifted in the art of creating them and thus had decided that, if he couldn't keep up with the others in creating, he'd ruin everyone's game of mocking him with them. (Madara could entirely respect that). His hair wasn't nearly as red as the other Uzumaki's and Madara could remember an incident of minor violence after his status as a full-blood Uzumaki had been questioned. (He could respect that, too.) Unfortunately, he hadn't partaken in the last battle due to a harsh flue just having been treated merely a day prior and thus, the medics had forbidden his presence on the battle-field. Takeru had obeyed; convinced not due to being sick but rather due to fearing the medic's wrath if he disobeyed. (Madara thought of the scarce few Uchiha's healers in his childhood and deemed that reaction utterly relatable.)

Anyway.

Now, the young shinobi was deemed fit and with them, getting closer to Hashirama who was waving him forth. "Anything?", the Hokage asked and after a slight hesitation, the Uzumaki nodded. "Barely anything", he confessed, though. "Could be a fluke, could be whatever security measures any Daimyo might have had set up, years ago. But…" "It also could be hidden seal-jutsu", Hashirama concluded, making Takeru nod, expression nearly contrite.

A heartbeat passed.

"We're heading west!" Hashirama's command effortlessly passed along their forces and Madara could feel the flickers of chakra as the Uzumaki straightened their seals around them, keeping their presence as unnoticeable as possible. And yet again, he waited for Madara to move, matching his every step, not once missing a beat.

If they weren't heading into battle right now, Madara would smoulder his shoes.

It took a while (enough so for them to wonder whether it truly *was* a fluke) for the first other Uzumaki to agree with Takeru's observation. But then, a second did… and when a third followed, Hashirama halted the army. "This might be our last opportunity", he warned. "Should our current suspicion prove to be true, we will soon be within the border of perception", if they weren't already, which none of them could be certain about. Thus, Hashirama chose his words carefully. "Those of you who haven't yet, enter battle-formation." It would slow them down some but by now, it didn't matter as much anymore as their formation closed around the Uzumaki, keeping their probably most valuable fighters in the upcoming battle in the midst of their own people.

"What about negotiations?"

It was Madara who'd asked. Of course it was Madara, Hashirama deemed with a silent sigh, his obsidian eyes sharp with anticipation but somehow nearly… mocking.

"We will not initiate negotiations", the Hokage decided, his words both, unwilling yet unwavering. "Should they choose to do so, we will listen. Otherwise, we engage in battle."

Madara grinned wildly and Hashirama could see a gleam in his eyes that had started growing ever more, the longer they had been on their way. Battle had always been nothing but a sad part of Hashirama's life; even now it was to be endured for the sake of later peace. But for Madara, battle -fight- had always been something else, something personal and beautiful. He couldn't share his lover's passion for it but after some talks with the Yamanaka, especially Ichigo (which Madara wouldn't hear anything of until they both were old and grey), he had come to the conclusion that this might be the raven's way of coping. He couldn't end violence and fighting, had never been able to… So, other than Hashirama, he had found joy -or perhaps, rather excitement- in it, other than pain.

He wasn't sure whether to pity the raven for it, or envy him.

"I don't wish to carry any dead home today", he announced, when the short rustle of movement behind him had concluded. "Do not take unnecessary risks."

Next to him, Madara made a derogatory sound and Hashirama sighed. "That goes for you, too, love", he chided, ever so gently, and for the briefest moment, the Uchiha seemed taken aback, before he caught himself. "Nah."

The Shoudaime sighed warily. There went his authority. And until today, Hashirama was uncertain whether Madara was being difficult on purpose or if he simply… well, *was*. A mixture of both probably, he mused, as he led their forces further west. At least, his ponderings about Madara forced him to stop wracking his brain about the possibility of this being some kind of trap or diversion. If it was, they would head north-east again as quickly as possible, but it would cost valuable time and also whatever element of surprise they might still have on their side. Maybe it had also been a mistake to take the majority of Konoha's shinobi with him. But he was their Hokage, he was a shadow, a leader, not the one fighting their battles solely by himself and despite his so-called godly power, he was still but a man

and one day he would inevitably die. He couldn't protect their village forever; he had to empower its people to do so, instead.

Madara hadn't even argued with that and Tobirama for once even agreed about- a myriad of senbon, seemingly coming out of nothing but thin air, crashed into them like a tidal wave from three sides and before he had even fully realised, Hashirama had moved to block Madara. It didn't matter how many hit himself, all that mattered was protecting the raven who would always be just that one tad too physically vulnerable because should whatever poison those needles might be coated with -most likely were- too much for his lover's weakened immune system…

Flicking his Gunbai, Madara led the final wave of needles astray, most of them impacting into nearby trees and while both of them would have been able to deal with that trap way faster, doing so would have entirely ruined any potentially still existing cover.

Had this been an attack due to any discovery of their camouflage or had it merely been a simple trap set off by physical triggers? Hashirama frowned, shaking off a few dozen senbon still embedded into his flesh. Whatever it was, it had been set up by shinobi. "Anything?", he asked, but the Uzumaki simultaneously shook their heads. "No seals", Takeru noted. "Most likely a physical trigger."

Two other Uzumaki were covering the chakra of two medics who quickly cared for the few people having been hit by the trap. Some kind of narcotic, apparently. Not stupid, Hashirama mused. If the victim was unconscious, it couldn't evade the rest of the senbon and die due to an overdose or be easy to capture if still alive.

Whatever it was, it didn't change the fact that there was no way this trap wasn't in some way connected to an alarm by whoever set it up. If they were unlucky, they had been detected and located by now. The more preferable (and less likely) option was some kind of passive signal that didn't alert right away -or at least not noticeable enough to draw attention from whoever was responsible for it.

No, Hashirama deemed after a moment. That option was so very unlikely he couldn't calculate with it. "As soon as the medics are done", no more than three minutes, "We will head straight towards the castle. We are close enough to still might hold some element of surprise. And if we don't: We defeated them once, already. We will do so again. For Konoha!"

"Charge", Madara bellowed, not caring to wait for his Hokage to signal moving again.

This whole façade would end. And it would end today.

Madara prided himself in his battle-prowess but even further (if less known) in his superior speed. There was barely any shinobi in existence able to catch up with him, if he truly put his mind to it. He could even outrun the God of Shinobi himself, even though he would catch up

on long chases due to his superior strengths. In sprints, though… He doubted there was any shinobi able to keep up with him.

Which had made their current travelling speed even more irritating.

By the time they had arrived at their destination, it felt like Madara could have already made it there, crushed the sealing shields, slaughtered everyone in his way and made himself a cup of tea. (At the very least, he would have already gotten the worst itches out by slaughtering *anyone at all*).

As things were instead, they had stopped right in front of some kind of barrier. It being early translucent, Madara had shifted though his dou-jutsu, before realising that for some reason he was able to make out a cackle of something (electricity?) with his Sharingan, whereas his Mangekyou Sharingan, for whatever reason, could make out far less.

“There’s no way we won’t be located immediately, as soon as we start unravelling this seal-wall”, Mito stated, making Madara frown. “There is no way we *haven’t* been detected yet, anyhow”, he noted and Mito rolled her eyes as he immediately discarded the (miniscule, yes, but nevertheless existent) chance for that to *not* be the case.

“It’s a mirror-seal.”

And there went the last of her hope for this to go any kind of easy, she noted wryly, her attention turning to Takeru. Not questioning whether he was certain (he would not have said anything, if he wasn’t), her lips thinned. “Any assumption about the severeness?”

Silence, for a moment. Then: “As high as you can think of, then add two.”

Her following cusses were rather un-ladylike and finally, Madara was fessed up with this whole cryptic nonsense, crossing his arms to demand at least basic explanation. But gladly, Mito spoke up again, before he could. “Mirror-seals reflect any incoming information”, she said, her red lips thinning. “Whatever meets the reflective side gets thrown back, with the incoming angle being the reflected one. Considering the accuracy needed to lay the seals and keep them into order, mirror seals are rare even among experts… they are no good in open battle; keeping them in line would be impossible.”

“Every mirror can be shattered with enough incoming force”, Madara noted and this time, it wasn’t Mito who answered, but Takeru. “Correctly drawn mirror-seals don’t fail as long as their caster is able to keep the seal-lines paralleled and feed the network enough chakra-input to reflect incoming information”, he explained. “It doesn’t matter if it’s sunlight, rain or jutsu, whatever meets the outer side will be reflected back, as long as there is an active chakra-source sustaining the seals.”

For once, even Hashirama understood the implications. “We might attack our own people in consequence, if we try to bring it down”, he realised.

“What happens to the chakra-source?”, Madara asked and for the second time in a row, Hashirama understood (behold!), suddenly becoming way too quiet and sombre.

“The seal will pull chakra as long as it’s connected to a source.” Mito’s face was grim. “Reflecting jutsu takes far less chakra than creating them but the seals draw chakra to do so consistently, as long as they have access to a source. That is what makes them so dangerous: While protecting, they will kill their caster at some point, should they not get disconnected. And if the reflected jutsu are powerful enough, that point might come rather quick.”

For a moment, silence fell above them. Last time, their enemies had connected Matatabi to whatever chakra-network Kumo’s allied Uzumaki had created. And even though capturing one Tailed Beast had been damn unheard of so far (differing clans had tried often enough, the results being… poor), having succeeded once would probably only make it easier a second time.

Finally, it was Hashirama who said what everyone else was already aware of. “We can’t forcibly break the wall”, he muttered. “If there is any of the others in there… I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself if we lost someone else. Not after…” Not after already losing Matatabi in the cruel fashion they had.

“I assume there’s established tactics to break those kind of seals”, Madara asked, already dreading the answer before Mito gave it to him, proving his suspicions right. “Yes”, she confirmed. “By breaking them by force.”

No surprise on that front, then.

“The most crucial part of mirror-seals is to perfectly align the layers and *keep* them that way”, Mito mused, her fine brows deeply frowned and her mouth pursed in displeasure. “If we could dislodge the layers, the whole unification collapses in on itself.”

“Without access to the outer lines, we cannot interfere with the inner seal-work.”

“It’s impossible to try; any attempt would be reflected right back at us.”

“Only if we use frontal approaches.”

“Does anyone know if crossing-line punctures might work in order to untangle the beta-spots?”

“The necessary chakra-injection would be reflected right back, no way.”

Madara supressed an eye-roll, not even bothering to pretend to have understood anything more than the most basic essence of that conversation. He was damn glad they had Uzumaki in their forces, as well, but having a bunch of them just talking about… this, made him want to zone out straight away.

Seals had never been his forte and he damn well knew why. He might be the smart one in his and Hashirama’s relationship but whatever the Uzumaki did with their seals went even over his head and once more he wondered how Hashirama could even be related to- *reverse*, *leap back, shove, re-locate, dodge* the stupid familiar rope as it snapped from behind the seemingly transparent surface for the ~~second~~ first time, now failing to snatch Hashirama’s

foot and instead retreating behind the crackling surface again. Next to them, shinobi flung across the trees, not bothering to even attempt to talk before attacking.

It didn't take the time of a single inhale, before Konoha's shinobi had walled around the Uzumaki in their midst, shielding them from the battle at all times, even Mito herself retreating to her clan-members.

The Uzumaki had to figure out a way to deal with whatever this seal was.

Madara grinned wildly, tongue flicking out as though to leap up the beginning taste of blood in the air.

The rest of them were designated to slaughter everyone attempting to stop them from succeeding.

Chapter 57

Chapter Summary

In which Zetsu does stuff!

Chapter Notes

I have started my new job this month and while I really enjoy it so far, it's just So. Much. Well... Work.
It's nearly midnight but I REALLY want to offer something to you.
Be aware that this is... "proof-read" with LARGE quotation marks... with me being so tired my eyes burn.
I'll proof-read again on sunday because till then, I just have no idea how to squeeze it in my shedule. (I promise to answer the still unanswered comments then, too!)

Love you, folks! Thank you for bearing with me!

The sphere stopped with a shuddering thud, mere inches before crashing into the at times translucent, at others seemingly rippling barrier. He didn't know if whether would pierce the seal if it connected, but there was no way to find out without potentially disastrous consequences.

The sphere retreated back behind his back, rotating once in its circle, while Hashirama scanned the barrier, searching for the inevitable glowing rope that would *again* appear from the barrier's other side. Whoever wielded it refused to cross the protective seal-barrier; instead forcing the attacks through it (which apparently was possible but required even more precision in keeping the barrier intact, according to Mito), leading to that cursed rope appearing unpredictably fast, forcing either him or Madara to repel it… or in the worst case, having the raven undo the result of whoever was caught by its clutches. To make matters even worse, the rope was repeatedly accompanied by massive elemental attacks, unleashed without any care for any of Kumogakure's shinobi still in range.

Everything about the whole situation just screamed Stalemate.

The first ambush had set up a pattern all too easy to discern, with Madara and him being forced away from their main battle-forces, while Kumo-shinobi took the opportunity to either engage battle through the seal-wall or even exit it in order to attempt breaking up their formation to stop the Uzumaki in their midst from working on bringing down the barrier-

seals. Eventually, those attackers not killed yet would retreat… and the whole scheme would start again, this time at a different place.

Hashirama was certain their enemies had no current way to actually defeat them, as otherwise, they would have used it by now. Instead, the Daimyo's palace, as well as a huge piece of the surrounding forest -with apparently, a peak at their direction of arrival- had been entirely surrounded by the truly gigantic mirror-seal. Unfortunately, this time it closed off the entire area, leaving no opening underground or in the sky whatsoever.

The sheer size of the whole construct had Mito confirm exactly what they all feared: It was nearly impossible for the necessary chakra to hail from human sources only. Hashirama's hopes about the "nearly" were ruined less than half a minute later with Mito stating that yes, there was someone able to maintain enough chakra to do so. Unfortunately though, that list started and ended with Hashirama himself.

Which lead to this rather unfortunate situation.

Obviously, they had been entirely right in engaging battle sooner rather than later, as it was obvious that whatever had been either planned or already in motion hadn't been carried out to completion yet. But just as obviously, they had already been in motion long enough to have been carried out to this point… And considering it was as much as certain that they had a second Tailed Beast somewhere in there -which was bad enough on its own- Hashirama didn't want to think about what would have happened if they had had the opportunity to actually carry out their plan.

On the far other side of the huge sealed-off area, Madara's Gunbai extinguished the rest of the flaming wall he had summoned to stop a compressed stream of water from unfurling and thus unleashing its destructive capability. Unfortunately, having prevented nearly all of the surrounding forest from being drowned also had resulted in creating enough steam to barely see anything in any direction. His irises rotated, Mangekyou spiralling into violet rings, but apparently, not even the Rinnegan was able to see more than usual if simple physical obstacles shielded the view. The fog was just too thick to make out anything and the surrounding forest stopped it from volatising any faster.

This whole situation was just the utter height of frustration.

Every single move, every single jutsu had to be stopped before it could hit the seal-barrier, lest it weakened whomever of their tailed, self-appointed siblings was used to feed it. And to add to the injury, he was absolutely certain that the same chakra-source was used to feed those cursed weapons from the previous battle, except he now didn't even have the possibility to take one of them down because the pathetic bastards *refused to come out!*

If he saw one, he wouldn't even need a weapon or a single drop of chakra to throttle any of them to death, he was rather certain at this point.

The uttermost worst about the whole situation was its sheer *uselessness*. The Daimyo's forces obviously had no possibility to beat them right out and thus attempted to stall for as long as possible, unfortunately succeeding in keeping Hashirama and himself busy and thus off their main battle-forces and the Uzumaki in their midst.

And the most frustrating thing about it all was that it worked. He had no idea how those bastards were able to change position as fast as they did (probably seals, though. If nothing else, the recent event had taught him to fucking. hate. seals.) but it was damn effective in keeping them both from the main-body of their army… and the exact same fucking tactic used last time: Stall the power-houses, attempt to slowly get rid of the rest.

Not that *that* made anything better.

Spitting out a small, tightly curled ball of fire in frustration, Madara bolted off. The fog still clouded his vision but there was yet another chakra-spike indicating the next attack to be dealt with.

This whole façade of a battle was-

"Useless!"

The dark, cloaked figure sneered into the direction where behind the castle-walls, a Bijuu strained against its bounds once more, its useless scream long since having lost any effect. "One is too few", he hissed. "We need a second one to feed the weapons."

"You assured me there was enough time to acquire another beast, while Konohagakure heads towards the Land of Lightning, instead of here", the Daimyo answered heatedly. "Just as you assured me our coalition with Kumogakure and the Whirlpool would guarantee success. You continued, even when merely a fraction of the Uzumaki joint us, despite the tremendous amount of payment I offered *additionally* to your so-called *guarantee*." Not even mentioning the enormous costs he had taken when it came to Kumogakure! "The plan-" "Will still succeed", Zetsu hissed, albeit forcing himself to sugar-coat his tone somewhat. Had everything gone as planned, Mother would already be with him and he wouldn't need this agitating excuse of a man anymore! But as things were now, he couldn't be certain yet how long he would have any use for him still. He couldn't risk agitating the man more than he already did; replacing him would be hard work and he couldn't risk any further distractions! Not when it was about Mother.

Mother.

Everything he had done, the centuries, the millennia he had waited, it had all been for Her. And this was the very first time the tides had been right. He would not waste this opportunity and wait another decade, century, millennium. And if that meant dealing with this pathetic excuse of a ruler, than he would do so as long as necessary.

Albeit, not a single moment longer.

Unfortunately, he was currently trapped in a rather unpleasant stalemate. The Bijuu's chakra-reserves were large but the seal-wall it fed was reliant on a constant charge. If they fully used the Treasures, the beast would waste away before their enemies were depleted enough of their own chakra! Last time, he had channelled the streams himself, intensifying them as to overpower that cured Ashura first, leaving Indra's eyes unprotected.

The useless two-tailed beast had been used up before he could reach his goal and at that very moment, Indra had disappeared, too. Which had been… an unpleasant turn of events.

Hot, white rage, over-bearing in its intensity, shadowing everything he had ever experienced in the millennia of his artificial life.

The eyes, the ~~cursed~~ blessed eyes had disappeared, out of his reach, his only key to finally, *finally* get beloved Mother back had been gone! How *dare* that useless imitation of Indra just leave with them?! If he had had just died, Zetsu would have saved the eyes; this Indra's new life was worthless for but this sole accomplishment!

And then he had realised, Ashura was gone, too. Not that it truly mattered; Ashura had always been all but useless. His eyes never had had a single pinch of power, they would be better of scratched out. But if Ashura *and* Indra were gone, they would come back. They hadn't been used up, other than the decaying carcass of the two-tailed beast rotting away in its seal-cage. And it didn't matter if they came back in a year or a thousand, because he would be ready. Next time, he would be prepared better. One beast was too little to keep defence and offense running against his foes; he needed at least one for each. Fortunately, there were eight more to use.

Unfortunately, in the end, everything had gone *far* more quickly than anticipated. The Daimyo's daughter had left the palace and considering she had no trained chakra-paths whatsoever, he had failed to notice her absence until the Daimyo deemed to tell him -which had been far, *far* too late to stop her as she had already been out his range of perception, at least for untrained, weak chakra-signatures as hers. She might have left for Konohagakure, she might have been torn apart by forest-wolves, it didn't matter. The useless girl had known nothing of true consequence.

And then, out of nothing but thin air, Indra's chakra-signature had re-appeared without any warning whatsoever.

Immediately, he had re-doubled their current pace of preparations but it hadn't been enough. Instead of doing the reasonable and waiting before gathering their forces, that cursed Ashura had set off right away! And to make matters even worse, him and Indra had headed towards the castle instead of Lighting-Country, which would have been the far more reasonable choice!

Just a day or two more.

A day or two more and they might have had finished their preparations; the second seal-cage was all but done, it merely needed to be filled with feeding material!

It was so, so close! Mother was so, *so* close!

He wouldn't disappoint her. Not again. Not when he had come this far.

"Keep the leaders off the main-army", he ordered, sweetening his voice to a suggestion as to hide away the command. "Do not worry, my Daimyo… I *will* find a way to subdue them!"

No. No, this wouldn't work.

Indra was fast but while he was quite confident he would find a gap in time, he couldn't risk him damaging the eyes in an attempt to fight him. Heading straight for the end-goal might end catastrophic; he would leave that only as the utter-last option, if everything else should fail.

He had to find other options, first.

The obvious second option was the Hokage.

It was an open secret (if it even still was one at all) Indra and his brother had quite an incestuous streak; apparently, the war's end had had less to do with friendship and *saving the future's generation* than declared in public. The Hokage was the perfect choice; if he succeeded, reaching his goal was all but guaranteed. If only there wasn't that one single problem.

Ashura was too strong.

That three times cursed man would rip him apart before he would be able to take hold und unlike Indra, he wouldn't need an ounce of speed for it.

As soon as he tried, he would be doomed to fail and while Zetsu was certainly willing to take risks if necessary, this would merely bring forth his own demise.

Curse Ashura, no matter which one!

And curse those damned Uzumaki, too.

Staying undetected had never been a difficult task for him; it had been in his blood to remain in the shadows, to wait for an opportunity instead of ruining it by rushing ahead.

But those cursed red-heads made moving unseen nearly impossible; as soon as he touched one of their seal-lines, he would be detected and his chance for success would dwindle even further.

Time had always been on his side. He had never needed to be quick; it had never mattered. What *did* matter, though, was being successful. And thus, he had waited his time.

Except now, it was against him!

The Tailed Beast dwindled with every passing moment and though it would hold for a time yet, there was no guarantee how long. At least, Ashura and Indra hadn't attempted to bring down the seal-wall yet, probably fearing their attack would be reflected upon their own forces. It was a silver-lining; Zetsu didn't know how long the mirror-wall would have held, had they decided to strike it down.

But nevertheless, it was only a matter of time, until their chakra-source ran out and once that happened, their offensive capabilities were severely outclassed.

And these three times cursed Uzumaki made it nearly impossible to keep watch over Konohagakure's battle-forces in order to figure out how to deal with this whole mess! He couldn't stay in close distance long enough to gather any helpful information and to make matters even worse, the seal-lines those traitorous Uzumaki kept casting made it ever-harder to remain undetected while switching positions. His artificial teeth grit in frustration as he slithered across the shadows once more, attempting to get as close towards the formation's core as he could. He needed something, anything, that would offer him an opportunity to-

"-that to my brother", a white-haired man said, deeply frowning at some paper-tags.

"He *does* realise actually is the Hokage, doesn't he?" Another man, face covered by a mask. "If he decided to, it wouldn't matter."

"Unfortunately", the white-haired man answered, "Anija is an idiot."

Zetsu felt his smile nearly split his face in half, before slithering aside, as to stay undetected by the Uzumaki's seeker-runes.

There was his plan.

“The lines have been breached!”

At the Uzumaki’s shout, Tobirama’s head jerked up from the seal-sheets he had contemplated, as did Kakuzu’s right next to him.

“Proceed with uttermost caution, we might-” Something latched onto him, his muscles locking up before he was able to react, his jaw freezing in place and- *“Hello.”* If possible at all, Tobirama grit his teeth even further as the voice resonated in his ear. Who- “*Ah, how rude.”* There was an undeniable smirk hidden behind the words. *“I am Zetsu. And I would very much like to talk to your brother.”*

His jaw unlocked ever so slightly, barely enough to form any words; nevertheless keeping his back ramrod-straight, his limbs sealed in place, twitching uselessly every once in a while, in a attempt to get free. His left hand! He could inch his left hand ever so slightly. It was the weaker one but it didn’t matter; all that mattered was that he was able to reach his pouch, fingers closing around the- his eyes widened ad he grabbed a kunai instead of the tag-seals he had aimed for and his arm jerked as he stiffened it, stopping the before smooth movement. It didn’t take a genius to realise his freedom of movement had been a farce as to prevent him from struggling.

Kackling, in the back of his mind.

“Ohhh, a smart one, aren’t you? Well then” the grin was so pronounced, Tobirama was nearly certain it showed on his own face, as well. *“I am sure you understand that the more cooperative you are, the sooner we will be done here.”*

“Tobirama?” Eyes narrowed, Kakuzu watched him, not moving yet but Tobirama knew his… friend. (There were few people deserving that title but the assassin had grown to be into one of them). He didn’t ask whether Tobirama felt alright, had never been one to waste time with useless questions (a trait Tobirama had always appreciated about the man). His thoughts were racing miles a minute but as of now, he had too little information; his- arm. Twitching madly in an afford to resist, his arm lifted, jerking the final way too fast else the assassin stepped in, and holding the kunai close enough at his own throat to draw a fine line of blood.

Now, the assassin’s face truly showed alarm. “What-”

His face twitched every which way, before his mouth set into a wry grin, showing far too much teeth. “I would speak with the Hokage, if you were kind enough to fetch him.” His voice was his own and yet it wasn’t, the intonation all wrong. Immediately, Kakuzu’s eyes narrowed. “Who are you?”, he demanded, making the grin split even wider. “Not someone whose name you need to know yet.” The answer was as unhelpful as it had been predictable.

By now, the minor commotion had had several heads turned into their direction, the notion spreading out as more people took notice. Tobirama had been nearly in between the

Uzumaki, just outside their inner circle and in the midst of planning and protection both – the first one whenever the second allowed a moment's time.

"I'll gladly tell you again", Tobirama said, his face twitching at every word, the kunai drawing another drop of blood. Nothing of significance yet, but enough to show seriousness. "I would like to have a talk with your Hokage, if you don't mind."

Tobirama nearly bit his tongue, attempting to supress the words being forced out of his mouth.

"How do I know you will stay your hand in my absence", Kakuzu demanded grimly, making Tobirama's shoulders shrug. "You will not", was the dismissing answer. "But if you don't leave, I will certainly *not* do so."

Ever so slightly deeper dug the blade, the few droplets of blood becoming a shallow tickle.

"Go fetch your Hokage, assassin. I will make him an offer he can't refuse."

Chapter 58

Chapter Summary

In which Izuna saves the day. Again.

Chapter Notes

I'm just... Gonna drop this here after two months and wallow in self-pitty for not having gotten anything done till now.
Thank you.

Madara cursed and for good measure, repeated the whole slur right again.

He was fast, yes. Easily among the fastest shinobi alive, quite possibly on top, if one didn't count seal-users and their teleportation-techniques. He had yet to find someone able to outrun him, including Hashirama himself, who, despite his mass of muscle, was able to stay ahead of most due to his sheer strength alone.

And yet even he couldn't be *in two places at once!*

Not even stopping the motion, his kick sent a Kumo-kunoichi back through the seal-wall before she had fully emerged, while his Gunbai smashed back the glowing rope trying to catch him. His Mangekyou pattern rotated counter-clockwise once, twice, but he couldn't afford to wait for the latest Voice of Doom's victim to fully realise what had -or rather, hadn't- happened. He just had…

He had no time.

None, none at all.

Hashirama was wherever, doing whatever, and, more importantly, doing so *right now*.

And that meant, Madara had no-one to protect his back. He had to cover the entire seal-wall by himself, had to reverse the fates of those of their people who had been sealed after being unable to resist the Call, had to minimalize the attack-fallouts and nobody stepped in to disburden him at least somewhat, nobody was there to have his back .

Just as it had been back during the clan-wars, he realised with a start, the previously fluid motion stuttering to a near stop, before he forced his muscles to continue the spin, kicking

loose a far too large amount of dirt and nearly uprooting a bush.

It had been… normal. Knowing that against Hashirama, nobody was able to help him if bad came to worse because it would not only be suicide but also utterly useless, to attempt to stand up against the God of Shinobi.

Not having Hashirama at his side had been *the norm*.

It had been... Had been…

Calloused fingers coming his hair, working out the tangles so softly be barely even felt it.

The tiniest stirring in the endless ocean of Hashirama's chakra as he coated his fingers with it; what a sacrilege to use those god-like might to untangle his hair.

"How about a dip in the onsen, later?", Hashirama had asked, his voice a low rumble against Madara's ear, his head betted in the Hokage's lap, nearly asleep. "How about you-"
"Go fuck yourself!", the raven snarled, defiantly kicking yet another Kumo-nin square in the chest; his Gunbai bashing him into the ground before he could smash into the seal-wall.

"What the fuck are you even doing over there?!"

"That is quite close enough."

It was Tobirama's voice, but it certainly wasn't him. The intonation, the ductus, the posture- he stopped, quite a few paces away from his little brother, whose hand still kept the kunai right at his throat.

"And who would you be?" Hashirama's voice was strangely calm, considering the situation he faced and Tobirama's tongue clicked disapprovingly. "I fail to see how that matters, Hokage-sama", he tutted. "Isn't it far more relevant why I am here?"

"I assume you are the one behind this whole charade." Despite it all, Hashirama wasn't *dumb*.

They had fought against Kumogakure's and a significant part of the Uzumaki's forces and emerged victorious. And in this second battle it was quite obvious as well, Konohagakure would -while not having claimed victory yet- at least not lose any time soon.

Kumogakure's battle force was living on borrowed time and they all were aware.

If whoever this was hadn't taken partaken in either battle until now, they had to be far enough up in the enemy's intel to not be able to afford to die.

And it didn't take a genius to come to the conclusion that by now, whoever was behind all of this was continuously running out of options.

In front of him, Tobirama grinned with what seemed too many sharp teeth. "Not as stupid as they are willing to believe." It didn't sound like a compliment and for a moment, neither spoke, until Tobirama, still grinning a far too sharp-teethed mouth, spoke up again. "Well then, Hokage-sama… Are you not interested in what I have to offer?"

Hashirama's eyes narrowed as he considered his options for a moment, obviously coming to the conclusion that he had no choice but to indulge… whoever this was in front of him. "And what would that be?", he asked, making his opponent hum.

"I don't kill your brother…" The fingers around the kunai tightened, drawing a thin, red line at the side of his throat, "And all you have to do in exchange is to get me Uchiha Madara's eyes."

A heartbeat passed. Then a second.

"You bastard."

The grin didn't even waver as Tobirama's second hand -twitching, fighting against the forced movement but nevertheless losing- rose, another kunai between his fingers. If possible, Hashirama gritted his teeth even more tightly, as the blade stopped right above his little brother's ear. "Hurry", Tobirama hummed. "We wouldn't want your brother to lose an ear if you take too long, do we?"

The Hokage's hands balled into fists. The simple threat on Tobirama's life wasn't enough; they both knew if whoever had forced himself onto Tobirama saw the threat on his life through, their own was forfeited the very second Tobirama was dead. So it wouldn't be death right away… it would be pieces of his brother, one after the other, until- The chakra underneath Hashirama's skin nearly broke out of its vessel, making the ground crack underneath his feet as he bolted away.

"Don't be reckless!"

"Don't be- what do you mean, don't be reckless?! It's your brother we are talking about!"

"And it's *your eyes* we're talking about", Hashirama cried.

This whole conversation was running in circles, except the very opposite ones it normally might.

As soon as he had reached Madara, the moment Hashirama had explained what had been asked, the Uchiha hadn't even hesitated and Hashirama had the sinking feeling that only the

still occasionally needed Reverse-Rescues had stopped Madara from having plucked his eyes out already.

It took three wooden clones at all times to even enable this conversation and despite these, the two of them were still constantly on the move, as his clones may be able to fight back nin-jutsu but held no hope against attacks created by the other strange weapons Kumogakure used.

They had long since learned that the Sage's gift apparently only applied to the original, not his clones.

"I have been blind before, Hashirama. I will live. We can re-take them as soon as your brother is safe!"

And that was what it came down to, wasn't it? They both were brothers; older brothers, the only ones left from their families. Hashirama would go to death and beyond for his little brother, just like Madara would, too.

And exactly because he would do the same, because he knew how Hashirama felt, he had taken the decision onto himself, had spared Hashirama the pain of having to ask, of having to demand that ultimate sacrifice, and just… it had been an array of roots and vines wrapping around Madara's hand, that had stopped him from tearing out his own eyes. Hashirama himself would have been too slow.

And that is how they had gotten into this argument… and had come to no conclusion, yet. They had other possibilities. Dozens of them. But all of them had needed to be declined because they knew nothing about their enemy!

"We both would have been able to end this battle, already, if we wouldn't be waiting for the safe route", the raven continued, referring to the Uzumaki still in the process of bringing down the seal-wall without endangering the Bijuu that was forced to sustain it.

"We can't even be certain that whoever this intruder is will stand by his word and leave Tobirama be, once we have given away your eyes!" The words burned on his tongue but they were true nonetheless. Madara's eyes were his lover's most powerful feature and should this… person not stand by his word, battling them within Tobirama's body would be far more difficult, should whoever this was would be able to make use of Madara's eyes.

And even if the intruder retreated and indeed left Tobirama… They would have Madara's eyes, which not only left the Uchiha blind but also allowed a whole bunch of new hardships on the horizon.

Whoever this was had had invested *way* too much time, energy and money to not have a specific plan about how to proceed once they had reached their goal.

"We can't discuss this any longer, Hashirama! You have a deadline!"

As if he didn't *know*! As if he wasn't aware that every word, every new (and old, by now) argument was an ever-rising possibility of his little brother being put to harm. But how was

he supposed to choose between a rock and a hard place if one of those two even refused to let him consider! He couldn't- "Seal them."

Hashirama looked up, blinking. They had already worked through this; they couldn't risk engaging in battle, Hashirama couldn't risk using those spheres lest those weren't only destructive towards his goal -the intruder- but also their host, killing both instead of merely the intended target. They had already talked about it -or rather, Hashirama had, in his desperation to find a solution. "What?"

"Seal them", Madara repeated. "My eyes." Or maybe rather- "One of them. Not both. We can at least try to negotiate by claiming to hand the sealed one over only after Tobirama is freed."

One, Hashirama thought. One, not both. Maybe… "Do your eyes both work the same?"

"This is getting kinda boring."

Kakuzu's piercing eyes rolled in obvious exasperation. "Stop whining, we're trying to work here."

"Why don't you work faster, then?!"

In front of them, the air blurred for a moment, before a sealing-sheet glowed, releasing its contents and crumbled.

Izuna grabbed it, removing it from the pile of sheets and threw it behind him. His Mangekyou Sharingan still activated in case his intervention was needed -and if it was, he was very aware it needed to be *right away*- he shifted his gaze back to the place a few meters across from him. The space in between was empty, their shinobi had formed a wide protective ring around it -them-, keeping off the occasional disturbance of any Kumo-nin. Which wasn't much, mind you. For some reason, they still tried to disband the Uzumaki who were working on finally releasing the seal-barrier and he had the suspicion those who actually attacked them here did so because they had been ordered to specifically go after Mito.

Which led them here, because -who would have guessed- Mito was no longer with the main forces of the Uzumaki. Instead, she was currently standing next to Kakuzu, an array of sheets on the ground, that she had connected with a wild diagram of chalk-lines she regularly brushed away to draw new ones.

"Strengthen the heart-connection", Kakuzu advised, his arms crossed and his brows drawn into a frown.

"That will release the seal upon death", Mito argued, making the assassin raise one of the previously furrowed brows. "Not when *I* get to work on it", he deemed.

Immediately the doubt left Mito's face and she re-drew some chalk-lines, intently watching the complicated muster on the ground.

"What about *my* heart", Izuna complained, releasing another seal-sheet, before flickering his gaze on an unfilled one to his left. His irises rotated once, twice, and the sealing formula rotated as well. As did the connecting sheets as the sealed information was copied exactly eleven times (prime numbers were easier, Mito said. Not that it made sense. Nothing about fūinjutsu made any fucking sense. Because if prime-numbers were easier, why hadn't they used thirteen?!), ready to be used.

The assassin hummed.

"When this is dealt with, I'll deal with your cock", he deemed. "Nothing to do with your heart, though. I have enough of my own."

"You couldn't do mine justice, anyway", Izuna sniffed carelessly, waving another sealing tag into the desired direction before throwing it on the ever-growing heap of used paper behind him.

"Stop flirting and get me those layers", Mito snapped, making Izuna roll his eyes. "Slave-driver", he complained, silently watching the Uzumaki and the assassin work for a few moments, before asking: "Are we *sure* they won't do anything dumb?"

"I thought you had someone from the main-force tell them", Mito said, her voice somewhat alarmed, despite not pausing her work.

"I did", Kakuzu confirmed. "A duo, actually, just in case-"

"There he is!"

At Izuna's call, the three of them turned around, facing the newcomer. Hands held up placatedly, closing in slowly, deliberately avoiding rash motion, Hashirama drew closer. Izuna frowned. "Somehow, I don't have the best feeling about this", he noted, being rather certain he wasn't alone in that regard.

It took a few more moments for Hashirama to close in enough to be able to see the trio fully from his differing angle… and to jerk into a stop right away.

Izuna put aside the n-th crumpled sealing sheet. Really, this whole thing was- he blinked. His irises rotated once, twice, before offering him a clear image. *"What the hell?!"*

It wasn't a screech. It was *not*.

Mito looked at him now, instead of the nearing Hokage. "What happened?"

Izuna didn't answer. Instead, he merely stared, as Hashirama moved faster, suddenly bolting off and landing right next to them.

"What is going on", the Shoudaime demanded, making Izuna stare at him, emotions shifting far too swiftly on his face to be recognisable. "I should ask *you* that", he finally gave back,

still staring at the Hokage's face. His right eye, still a deep umber, widened… as did the left one, a Mangekyou Sharingan pattern still twirling within.

For a moment, none of them spoke, before finally Kakuzu broke the strange silence. "I assume you didn't get our message."

Hashirama blinked and Izuna still couldn't avert his gaze. Those weren't his eyes! Hashirama might be Hokage, might be able to wield and honour them, but they *weren't his eyes*.

"We got no message", he confirmed their suspicion, making Mito's face drop. However… "That still doesn't explain why you have my brother's eye", Izuna hissed, and for a moment, Hashirama was taken aback. Izuna was a usually cheerful, mocking nature. It was rare he acted so vigorously, but it wasn't as if he could fault him.

"We had to take the best bet."

"And what", Izuna demanded, bristling, "Was the *best best*?!"

Considering that Izuna might have been slightly distracted, it was Kakuzu who resumed releasing the sealing-sheets, starting his own heap of used tags next to him.

"I didn't do anything without his consent, Izuna", Hashirama swore, starting to look around. "I… We just… Where is Tobirama?" If it weren't for the others apparently being rather unbothered by whatever had occurred while he was gone, Hashirama was very aware he would be much more frantic.

Kakuzu huffed. "So the messengers really didn't make it", he noted, making Hashirama turn to him. "With what message?!", he finally cried. Of course, Madara hadn't been able to cover the entire area anymore, as soon as he had arrived! He knew! He knew, they hadn't been able to save all of their people, that some attacks had gone through, that- "The message was that we had it under control and you should keep the seal-wall border safe and *not do anything stupid*", Izuna snarled, interrupting his spiralling thoughts.

Hashirama's head shot up. "What?"

"Kakuzu was with Tobirama, when he was"- Mito made a face, her still perfectly drawn lipstick amplifying the gesture, before she continued, "*Invaded*." For the lack of a better word. "As soon you -and thus, he, by occasion- were informed of the goal of Tobirama's ransom, he activated the sealing-sheets we -that is, Tobirama, Kakuzu, Izuna and me- have been working on for months, now."

"You…" Hashirama swallowed, uncertain how to feel about it. "You sealed him? Sealing people is-"

"We didn't seal him, you big baby", Izuna snarled, not caring about his Kage's tender feelings. Not when he had *his brother's eye*! "We sealed my Mangekyou ability. Time leaps. Thirty seconds long. As soon as Kakuzu contacted me, I made my way here!"

“What Izuna means”, Mito took over again, “Is that we didn’t seal Tobirama. Sealing living beings is abhorred in every way and you certainly know that. We sealed Izuna’s time-leaps. And now we’re casting them on Tobirama because during our experiments we noticed that while Izuna is able to move within his casted leaps, nobody else is. That means, Hashirama, we’re doing nothing to Tobirama at all -except sending him and his guest thirty seconds into the future exactly every half minute. He cannot move, he cannot act, he doesn’t even realise he is in motion. And neither does his… guest.”

“Unfortunately”, Kakuzu grumbled, “We haven’t yet found out how to automatically connect the seal-activations. We have to release each seal manually, or the time-leaps will stop and as soon as they do, Tobirama and our unfortunate guest will realise what happened.”

For a moment, all Hashirama could do was stare.

Then he stared another, for good measure.

“… What?”

Unimpressed at best, Izuna blew a stray strand of black hair out of his face (not that it mattered much since it fluttered right back). “We’re keeping Tobirama and whoever steers him in stasis while Mito figures out how to seal the fucker out of Tobirama and inside herself.” Izuna’s voice was still biting. “And now that I’ve cut the whole issue into Hashirama-intelligence-sized bites: *Why do you have Aniki’s left eye?!”*

Yet another moment passed, before Hashirama had finally gathered what little wits he had. “He… Wanted to hand over both of his eyes right from the start”, the Hokage finally said. “I tried to talk him out of it; those are *his* eyes, after all and we didn’t even know what they were intended to be used for, or if that… intruder would keep his word.” He repressed reflexively closing his eyes as another wave of shame washed over him. Not being able to protect his little brother; his lover sacrificing his precious eyes; his fault; he was weak weak *weak*- “We… came to a consensus, after some debating. We couldn’t cover the seal-wall entirely anymore, I presume at some point the messengers you sent were killed when they tried to locate us. Madara finally agreed we shouldn’t hand over both of his eyes just for the enemy’s word.”

He saw Kakuzu taking a seal-sheet from a small pile, activate it and set it aside onto yet another pile of used up ones and this time, the motion made sense, at least.

“I… We…” He stopped for a moment, before starting anew. “He gave me his eye to ensure Tobirama’s life… I gave him mine. It’s not a Sharingan, but…” But better than nothing. Better than being blind, again. “I… would have given away this one to ensure Tobirama’s safety. The second one is still with your brother, where it belongs. I would have demanded the intruder accompany Tobirama and in the best case me to Madara, in order to take the second eye as soon as possible. Had we made it in time, the right eye would have been enough for your brother to reverse time on the outside, to put the left eye back inside my skull, where I could keep it safe while we took care of the enemy without rising Tobirama’s life.”

Because Madara's eyes didn't work the same, he had told him. Merely the left one reversed time on the outside, forcing others back through time. The right one, however, was the one he used to cast *himself* back.

Izuna crossed his arms. "At least my brother had a plan", he huffed, making Hashirama blink. This whole thing had been his idea, actually, and it had taken quite some time to get Madara to agree. But he wasn't sure that made anything better, so he kept his mouth shut and watched another sealing-sheet crumple, its job fulfilled.

"I didn't want to break the tension." That was Mito, very much breaking the tension and in another life, Hashirama might have kissed her for it. "But I'm done here. As soon as we're ready, we can proceed."

Izuna eyed his brother's lover. "Do you know how to use that eye if you need to?"

Hashirama frowned. "Not very well", he admitted and the Uchiha made a face.

"Then let's hope everything works out flawlessly."

Chapter 59

Chapter Summary

In which Zetsu has a no good, very bad day.

Chapter Notes

I'm just... gonna drop this here because otherwise I'd just hate myself once more for taking so long.
Hope you all have a great sunday!

“Are you sure I shouldn’t switch with Madara?”

It would merely take a few minutes to get him here, so he would be able to reverse the situation if it got out of hand. After all, who knew what really had happened to Tobirama.

“I took neither you nor Madara’s chakra-signatures into account, when I started the lines. Weaving around you was doable but if you leave now, you’ll tangle *everything*. And-”, she continued, as Hashirama opened his mouth, “Don’t you dare produce a clone right now. I don’t know which consequences separating your chakra-source would have, now.”

Not coming up with a sensible answer to Mito’s verbal dressing down, Hashirama nodded meekly. Interrupting was probably a bad idea anyway, he told himself. Mito, Kakuzu and Izuna had it under control. They already had, before he had even arrived. But… this was about Tobirama. His little brother. What if anything went wrong and Izuna wasn’t fast enough to pause it? What if even Hashirama would be late? What if-

A flash of red that had been branded into his memory from his very first day on the battlefield interrupted his thoughts as Izuna’s Mangekyou Sharingan fixated a spot right in the middle between him, Mito and Kakuzu. He forced himself to snap his mouth shut; any interruptions now would, despite his best intentions, be contra-productive.

A tense moment passed in silence, as the last seconds of the final time-skip Tobirama had been forced under ticked by.

Twenty-eight.

Twenty-nine.

Thir- Four rows of seals flashed on the ground.

“You know how you declined that offer to talk, last time?” There hadn’t been one, not really, but Izuna had once again decided to be a noisy piece of shit. “How about we start it all over? It’s not that you have anywhere to be, is it?”

Silence.

For a few, unbearingly long seconds, before Tobirama -Tobirama’s *voice*- spoke up again.

“What have you *done*?!”

“I’ll tell you… next time.” Of course, the fucking Uchiha actually snickered upon saying that.

“Stop struggling.” This time, it was Mito talking, her tone leaving no room for arguments. “Neither you, nor Tobirama will be able to escape these seal-knots.” Not that it made a difference to before, except this time, both, Tobirama and his… guest… would notice the passing of time.

And even if Tobirama would somehow be able to move, he was still unescapably trapped within a three-layered seal with a fourth layer around those, to protect the inner three against outside influences.

Nothing got out.

And no information outside of immediate physical reach got in.

“What do you want with Madara’s eyes?”

The words were out before Hashirama could stop himself. Uncharacteristically biting and cold.

“Hokage-sama.” Tobirama’s eyes twitched as his host tried to aim them at Hashirama, but the effort was pointless and thus, the Hokage stepped closer, entering his little brother’s field of view. “Ah.” The sigh that was forced out of Tobirama’s throat sounded terrible. “I see you already claimed them yourself.” Tobirama’s mouth lifted in a mocking smile. “I missed it, last time… When you killed your brother.” His irises widening, Hashirama forced himself to supress the impulse to take a step back. “History is bound to repeat itself, isn’t it?”, Tobirama’s voice mocked. “Last time, you killed your brother. This time, you killed your lover.”

For a moment, neither of them spoke and when Hashirama asked his next question, he was rather certain he already knew the answer.

“You were already there, then”, he demanded. “Last time.”

Tobirama’s lips were pulled back into a sly grin. “Last time? Which last time do you mean?”, he asked. “There have been so many, now. But if you mean the first time… Then yes. I have already been there. I have been there, since that- since dear Mother got so cruelly taken away,

sealed away so far out of my reach…" Tobirama's voice dropped. "You burned your brother, last time. All I need to free Mother of her prison are his eyes." The voice dropped even further, nearly whispering, now. "You already killed him. Doesn't he deserve to not have died in vain? You don't even need to help me, afterwards… Just allow me to use his eyes. Just once… I will return them to you, after! I am sure you have sealed away the second one… You would not destroy it. You are smarter than that, Hokage-sama."

Hashirama was quiet for an awfully long moment. So long, in fact, Izuna had already opened his mouth to tell his Kage to use his brain for once and not allow himself to be dragged away by pity; whoever this was, was obviously full of shit and then some!

"You already wanted his eyes", the Hokage finally whispered, "Back then. All that time back then, when it was Ashura and Indra and the Tailed Beasts." Unconsciously, his hands balled into fists. "Ashura and Indra grew apart and in the end, Ashura killed him." For reasons he still didn't fully understand as everyone he had heard the story of so far, had told it different.

He raised his gaze.

"You antagonised the Daimyo against us, the Uzumaki-clan whom we have always been cousins with, the newly founded Cloud-Village… And you want me to believe you didn't have any influence in Ashura killing his own brother?"

Their cousins from the Whirlpool *waged war* against them!

The clan they had had blood-pacts with, as long as Senju-memory could recall!

The ground cracked underneath Hashirama's feet, pure chakra bursting it.

"You will leave", he whispered, the implanted eye twirling, twirling, *twirling* until its red iris spiralled into violet rings; glowing in the fury on an Elder God, with his fists shaking in earth-crumpling rage. "You will *never* come back because I swear upon my own blood I will *annihilate* you, if you ever do. I will wipe *every single trace* of you off this earth."

Slowly at first, then ever faster, Tobirama's face distorted, until a snarling mouth seemed to take over his entire face and with a noise more animalistic than human, Tobirama's body flung itself across the narrow space within the seals, right at him, a black substance flinging itself further as Tobirama's body was stopped by the first sealing-borders. Undoubtedly aiming for his face, stretched so thin it didn't even resemble anything closely human anymore and-

Screeched as it was torn into a halt, writhing, right between the second seal-barrier and the third one.

"So." Despite all she had witnessed in the last moments, Uzumaki Mito didn't even seem the tiniest bit dishevelled. "You separated from Tobirama on your own. That makes it far more easy." She hadn't especially expected this, if she was honest, though. She had thought it to be some kind of ranged controlling-jutsu, able to manifest the caster's consciousness into specifically prepared hosts. But there was no connection to the outside, no jutsu cast, no connection to somewhere else.

Whoever -*whatever*- this was, that had rooted itself into Tobirama… it was the original being.

Kakuzu's eyes flicked towards her. "Are you certain?", he asked. He didn't doubt her, never would, but still, he was aware of the sacrifice she was willing to make; the border she was willing to cross.

"It doesn't matter how many times I have to try!" The writhing shadow's screech was all but inhuman. "I can fail and fail and fail…. I merely have to succeed once! Once, to bring back Mother! You cannot hold me, not forever!"

"Not forever", Mito agreed. "But as long as necessary."

Behind her back, a myriad of golden chains emerged, their glowing tips twirling nearly otherworldly.

"You have kept all of us in check… Now I will keep *you* in check."

And with that, the ultimate sealing-chains shot forwards, piecing the black silhouette writhing and twitching to escape, wrapping around it entirely…

And pulled back, shattering the seal-barriers around Tobirama struggling to get up, and drawing back deep, *deep* into Mito herself, securing their target into the one place it would never be able to escape.

Sealings of sentient beings were horrific.

Sealings of these into *another* sentient being were even more so.

But as the ultimate chains glowed one last time, securing their prey into herself, she didn't particularly care.

Silence was a strange concept in the middle of battle and yet it was foreign to none of them.

The deafening quiet, merely interrupted by the beating of one's own heart, the pumping of blood in one's veins. Waiting for the big bang to occur, the signal to start the fight, the yelling of-

"Tobirama!" In what had to be the fastest Hashirama had ever moved, the Hokage appeared next to his little brother, frantically lowering his hands onto him, glowing green in healing chakra. "Are you alright? I'm so sorry, I-"

The younger Senju struggled to get up. "*I* am sorry", he bit out, his body quivering with exhaustion. "It was too fast, I couldn't- and once it was… inside me, I couldn't resist, it was too strong."

The Hokage's glowing hands gently pushed Tobirama back onto the ground, by now covered in a thick layer of moss. "It's alright, don't worry. I'll make sure-"

Something shattered.

No sound like the single crack of a cup tumbling from the table, nor the shatter of dropped metal against a hard ground.

Instead, a myriad of glass shattered all at once, the sound painful to hear for anyone nearby, echoing between the trees.

Mito looked up, her lips thinned into a red line. "The seal-wall broke."

Kakuzu frowned, turning towards the sound's direction. "The chakra-channelling must have been stopped due to you sealing away… *that*."

The Uzumaki nodded and they quietly watched their Hokage tend to his little brother, a few moments passing by quietly.

Then, the ground shook, as fire engulfed the horizon; a wall of flames crushing everything in its path, giant enough it seemed to cover the entire horizon in its red, deadly glow.

"Seems Aniki noticed it, too", Izuna noted and upon Hashirama's answering expression -torn between the need to stay behind with his little brother and the urge to leave, to help Madara- he rolled his eyes. "Let him blow off some steam", he said, taking the decision off the Hokage's shoulders. "He doesn't need his second eye, to wrack havoc." Probably not even the first one, actually. "Don't worry about him, he'll be fine. Don't get in the way with that."

"Out of my way."

This could have been fun.

Under normal circumstances, it would be.

But right now, he didn't have time enjoy slaughtering pathetic enemies.

The seal-wall had fallen in what was -he assumed- the moment Hashirama had managed to take out the master-mind behind this whole scheme. Cut off the chakra-source feeding it before, the wall had collapsed.

Just as those pain-in-the-ass weapons that had made this whole ordeal so much more complicated.

He knew, because he had fought off two at them, right when that stupid wall had shattered in front of him. The fuuton-justu intending to blow him off his feet had vanished, just as that dangerous rope the cutting winds had intended to tackle him into.

Two Kumo-nin -a shinobi and one incredibly ugly kunoichi- had stared at him, their expressions having fallen open in shock. The oh-so-powerful weapons useless in their hands, as his fire tore into the enemy-lines, crushing any resistance in its way, until someone (a few Uzumaki, if his sensoric capabilities weren't wrong) managed to get it under control; forcing its flames upwards where they wracked havoc in the sky until having burned out.

Not that their effort changed anything about the churned bodies and the smell of burned flesh.

It was pathetic, really, Madara deemed, how apparently they had set up a defence line behind the seal-wall but apparently never considered the actual possibility of it breaking – or maybe, they merely hadn't had the numbers anymore, to produce anything better.

Not that it mattered, really. When he was done, there wouldn't be numbers left to defend *anything*.

Unfortunately for the two Kumo-nin still standing in front of him, his katon-jutsu hadn't burned them to ashes, as he had merely aimed to clear the path further ahead of him.

Even more unfortunately, they both decided to stand their ground, each of them drawing a pair of differing weapons – normal ones, that was. Merely a katana and some kind of two-handed… hammer? "How undignified", he noted.

And then, with a speed that made his silhouette all but blur, he rushed closer, his blade cutting the hammer's far too long handle into pieces. Having had a single moment more to react, the shinobi managed to bring up his weapon just as the woman's head rolled to the ground.

Yet again unfortunately for him, that didn't save him as Madara's single remaining Sharingan burned into his eyes. With his next intake of air, he slumped to the ground, tearing at the imaginary wooden vines that had taken over his body, tearing his joints nearly out of their sockets. For a moment, Madara considered whether that might be tactless, before realising he didn't particularly care.

He had far more important issues to worry about.

For a moment, he hesitated, considering. He didn't know whether it was possible in this state; summoning that which usually took the full power of both of his eyes. However; he would be on his own, for the time being, far behind enemy lines, even though Hashirama probably wouldn't make him wait for long.

This was the wrong time to potentially under-estimate the Uzumaki, Madara deemed – or rather, those of them who had decided to wage war against the Senju, despite the Hokage's heartfelt protests.

The Sharingan obeyed all too willingly, as he pulled forth the power hidden beneath it.

The second one, though… the eye Hashirama had implanted from himself, as soon as he had finished putting Madara's Mangekyou Sharingan into his own empty socket… merely throbbed painfully, not able to channel the chakra pumping into it.

How strange, Madara thought for a moment. He had not considered it in years and the thought was laughable considering the God of Shinobi's pure *power*, but right now he couldn't help but think of what a crippled existence it was, without ever having access to the Sharingan, without ever having truly *seen*.

He felt Hashirama's eye bleed from stress and grit his teeth, before forcing himself to calm for a moment, closing his eyes.

Unlocking the Sharingan merely evened the path to a deeper, truer understanding of one's power. Such did the Mangekyou Sharingan, albeit *much more* power. He had already unlocked it. He had already understood, realised that sacrifices necessary to achieve that hidden truth. It was part of him, that knowledge, and he didn't need its physical manifestation to bring it forth.

When his eyes opened again, the skeletal essence of a midnight blue Susano'o engulfed him.

That would be enough, for now. His priority was moving quickly, anyhow and a fully formed Susano'o would ultimately be too large.

Nevertheless, he didn't make it far, before he slammed into a stop, captured into a web of sealing-jutsu so expertly hidden, he hadn't even seen them. Commenting his curiosity whether having both of his eyes would have made a difference with a rather undetermined "Hn", the chakra-construct surrounding him rose its four arms, before it hesitated for one short moment, merely to crush its fists down and shatter the barrier around him.

What a disappointing obstacle, he deemed. Hashirama probably wouldn't even have noticed it.

Just as disappointing as the utter lack of resistance he met on his way, tearing apart yet another ring of seal-jutsu attempting to slow him down.

He couldn't be too far from the castle now, he deemed. The area had been too tightly sealed off, to be much larger.

That was, when out of nothing but thin air, a myriad of raiton-needles stormed upon him, the flurry of motion and crackling energy making it impossible to determine a direction. Madara wasn't above admitting he wouldn't have been able to parry them all, if it hadn't been for the surrounding chakra-construct simply shrugging them off like a cloud of particularly annoying flies.

For a moment, he considered dismissing it; finally allowing battle and blood alike to flow; to have at least some amount of fun, if nothing else. But then, just as quickly, he reined himself back it, huffing in frustration.

He had a more important goal right now.

Which was when merely a few seconds later, rows of Kumo-nin blocked his path, he wasn't certain whether to be relieved to *finally* get some amount of proper action or annoyed about those stupid attempts to delay him.

For a moment, his Susano'o wavered, before he let it dissolve into thin air, the last remands wavering around him, as though they were hesitant to miss anything.

Then, the blade in Madara's hands rotated exactly once, the scythe swinging into position with perfect precision.

"You may leave now", he deemed. "If you do, it might offer you a chance to escape while I am still busy."

No one left.

Fine then, he decided, as he gripped the handle ever so slightly tighter, to make sure the spaying blood wouldn't slicken his hold. This whole façade had ruined the peaceful life at Hashirama's side he never even considered having – never even considered *wanting* in the first place.

Peace had been a concept so foreign, so unthinkable, even wondering about it was unthinkable.

And then, Hashirama had walked along, with his soulful umber eyes, his bis stupid heart and his even bigger, even stupider dreams.

"I will slaughter every single one of you", Madara growled, his eyes burning in fury, "For daring to step on his dream."

Chapter 60

Chapter Summary

Today in Konohagakure's FAQs:
"What makes Wood Style so strong?"

Try to bodyslam a tree. Now imagine a tree bodyslamming you.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The taste of blood was clinging to the roof of his mouth and he licked it off, savouring the taste of battle for a moment, before swallowing it down.

His weapon didn't even falter as it cut flesh and bone alike, blood spraying of the curved blade and he made a face.

If it would at least be *his own* blood he was tasting, this… fight… would at have the potential to be somewhat entertaining.

He had considered simply wiping the field with a newly developed combination of nin-jutsu. However; he was well aware there was an unknown number of Uzumaki still residing within the castle-grounds. And, even though close to none of the clan's members were particularly gifted in nin-jutsu, those were rather commonly turned against their caster in battle.

Thus, considering he still merely had one of his own eyes, with Hashirama nowhere to be seen, tai-jutsu it was.

Not that he complained, though. The quelch of tearing flesh and the spray of blood as he looked into his enemy's eyes certainly had its own charm.

Nevertheless, this whole charade left one elementary question unanswered: Where were the Uzumaki?

They had already mostly acted in the background during the previous, as well as this battle. Not that he could blame them; Uzumaki weren't short-ranged fighters. Exceptions completed the rule, as always, though. He knew about two short-ranged kunoichi in their own forces and had to admit the seal-work around their dual-blades deserved to be called terrifying.

Which brought him back to his question from before: Where were *Kumogakure's* Uzumaki?

There had been a few of them amongst the striking-forces attacking from behind the seal-wall who had retreated as suddenly as they had appeared. But since the seal-wall had fallen -and

with it whatever connection had charged those thrice-damned weapons-, they hadn't shown up anymore, for better or for worse.

For a moment, he frowned, before he raised his hands and summoned a fire-ball to crash into the paralyzing strings of raiton-jutsu being send at him. Concentrated enough to burst through the cracking ropes of electricity, but easily to dodge, should it be attempted to be used against him.

It wasn't.

Just as intended, it shot across the battle-field, scorching the ground and forcing more than a few Kumo-nin to leap away in order to avoid being burned to a crisp. But even if nothing of consequence had happened now, the possibility of it being a trap to lure him into larger casts was too real to be ignored.

Not that that was a bad thing, really. It merely meant that he had one more reason to rip these people apart with his own hands.

"Madara!"

He didn't even turn around. "You're late."

"I'm-" Hashirama shook off a doton-jutsu attempting to throw him off his feet, "I'm sorry!"

"You can fuck off again", the Uchiha snapped. "I'm pretty much done, anyhow."

The pout taking over the Hokage's features was absolutely uncalled for, considering the droves of dead people around them, really. I few of them had tried to flee, after realising their battle was a lost cause. Not that they had gotten far. Madara had had given them their chance to turn tails… he had never had any intention of repeating that offer.

Those, who stood against Hashirama, would by his hand. Easy as that.

"You can still surrender!"

And as always when Hashirama was included, there went his plans down the river.

"I already gave them that chance", Madara barked, making Hashirama sigh.

"There's how many of you still left?", the Hokage asked, making sure his voice would be loud enough to be heard by any Kumo-nin around them. "Two dozen? Maybe some more. Let us be honest; this is it. Neither of you have any chance to escape, much less win this fight. There's no need for you to die a useless death. Surrender and you will live."

They didn't surrender.

For that, if nothing else, Madara was willing to respect them.

Just as much as he respected Hashirama, who, despite his obvious wish for a different solution, drew his katana and finished the fight alongside him.

"How's Tobirama?", he asked, once they had finished crushing the last meagre remnant of resistance. Hashirama sighed. "He is… overall fine", he answered. "There are a few disruptions in his chakra-paths and after… I'll tell you later." That would be best, Hashirama thought. Also, Izuna, Kakuzu and Mito were to take the respect for capturing what most likely was the one pulling the strings in the background all this time. "Let's head to the castle, first."

"Hn." Madara threw him a look out of the corner of his eye, debating for a moment on whether to demand an explanation, before ultimately deciding against it. If it were of immediate importance, Hashirama would tell him, no doubt.

What *was* of importance, though, was the fact that said castle was already visible from their current position. They closed in from a different direction than last time – or rather, the one time they had visited the castle not *that* long ago, still filled with nothing but peaceful intentions. (Well.. Hashirama had been. Madara had always been the less friendly one, after all.)

That hadn't even been two years ago, Hashirama thought gloomily. How fast the tables had turned, after that.

They closed in even further, quickly despite their caution for seal-traps. After all, they both knew how crafty Uzumaki-jutsu could be… and how deadly. And even though neither of them doubted their ability to break any attempts, the last two battles had proved over-confidence to be potentially disastrous.

And yet, even as they closed in further, no more hindrances slowed them down. No more Kumo-nin got in their way, neither did any Uzumaki.

Ever bigger the castle got and finally, they closed in enough to get a proper view of most of the giant building. There had been seals surrounding it, Hashirama noticed, but strangely, those seemed already disrupted. It couldn't be the work of any of their own people; something from within had ruptured the seal's work. Despite being familiar with seal-work, though, he was not even close to any kind of expertise with them, making it impossible to spot what exactly had occurred.

What he did spot, though, within what he knew were the castle's open-roofed and spacious gardens, made him stagger for just one moment. Stagger and swallow and then yell in agitation, as roots burst from the ground, uncaring for any traps they might trigger, the wood groaning in a strange mirror of his own horror. He couldn't yet see it all, was still too far away, but in the garden, tied down by rope-seals that could only ever be Uzumaki-work was-

"Kokuō!"

The Hokage's chakra surged and boiled as he shot forwards, all intentions of careful advancing thrown into the wind as he leaped forward.

Immediately at his side, forcing himself to move faster as to keep up with the Hokage's powerful leaps, Madara considered his options.

It wasn't as though the sight of his self-proclaimed, slightly too large brother didn't make his very blood boil and burn in fury and thirst for revenge alike. But unlike Hashirama, he had very much expected to be met with a situation like this. There was, after all, no way any of the Tailed Beasts had been willingly participating in this whole ordeal.

Not that Hashirama hadn't been aware, either. Unlike Madara, though, he just hadn't fully considered the implications.

After a silent moment of consideration, Madara allowed himself to fall back half a step.

Hashirama had every right to be furious, every right to tear this whole place to the ground and to slaughter every single person within. It was rare enough for him, to truly be forced out of his gentle, kind nature.

Madara already had had his fun in this battle.

Now, he would do his duty: To be Hashirama's shadow, the shadow of their village's Shadow of Fire, and keep his back safe. Hashirama could lead… and as he had always done in the end, Madara thought with a wry smile, he would follow.

When they crossed another sealing-line, this one still intact until Hashirama simply *punched* it to tatters, Madara barely supressed a flinch -and nearly slammed into the Hokage's broad back an instant later, who had turned to face him, his usually gentle features still a furious growl, but nevertheless asking: "What's wrong?"

The Uchiha made a face. So much for controlling his reaction, apparently. "The last seal-line was a signature-silencer. Go on, nothing to worry about." It had merely been… uncomfortable. Previously, all chakra-signatures within the seals had been greatly diminished, merely noticeable if he had truly focussed on finding anything at all. Now that the seal had been smashed, every single one of them had come rushing in; a mountain punching him in the guts where he had previously searched for grains of sand. He forced himself to break his previous concentration, zooming out to where Kokuō's chakra still outshone anyone else within the castle, even though he had been greatly diminished. But, Madara noticed… Even now, there weren't… there should… "There are no shinobi in the castle."

Hashirama's face fell slack; for a moment, the Hokage forgot his all-consuming rage in the face of his lover's sudden exclamation. "What?"

"There are no shinobi in the castle", Madara repeated, frown deepening, as he searched underneath the Bijuu's towering presence – a feat far more easy than it should be, which… said something about Five Tails' current condition. "They either have another sealing-line further inside" -unlikely but not impossible- "Or…" "They have left", Hashirama concluded,

nodding in agreement. For a moment, he was silent; both of them were well aware they might enter yet another trap but- the chakra-ropes glowed and the ground shook underneath the castle as Kokuō once more desperately struggled to break free, merely to be crushed into the ground again where yet another seal-barrier absorbed the shock-waves of his efforts. The following howl was nearly pitiful in comparison to the Tailed Beast's gigantic form as it called out for- "Ashura… Ind-", once more the ropes sealed shut, thrashing the Beast's head onto the ground and shutting him up.

Madara thought he could see blood seeping out from underneath his chin, where he might have had bitten his tongue.

Predictably, Hashirama didn't hesitate to turn around and head towards the castle-gardens -or rather, what had once been the gardens. A whole chunk of the building was missing in order to fit the Tailed Beast's body inside – or rather, the first third of it. Too large to fit inside even close to completely, merely his head, throat and front-legs had been placed within the enormous gardens. His hind-legs had been tied to the ground where Hashirama knew had once been pompous meeting-rooms facing the royal garden in all its glory. The five tails didn't fit inside the building-limits at all and thus, each of them had been flocked to the ground, the seeping blood having turned the white fur into a red nightmare.

Once more, Kokuō tried to lift his head when they finally got close enough to leap across the castle's roofs, Hashirama landing first, immediately bolting at the Bijuu's front.

"It's alright, it's alright, I'm-", he finally got close enough to touch the Tailed Beast's face, right underneath the large eye that struggled to meet him due to the head's fixed position. "I'm sorry, I'm so, *so* sorry." He took a deep breath, forcing himself to let go of the captured Beast in order to snap his palms together in a simple snake-seal.

Underneath them, the earth shook, before a pair of wooden hands emerged from the ground. And instead of doing the reasonable thing, Madara noted from where he was working on the Beast's tails, Hashirama, simpleton that he was, merely *crushed* the sealing bases into the ground, until nothing but a pulp of tatters remained.

As careful as possible, his Susano'o gripped the first stake impaling Kokuō's left tail in a lake of blood, to pull it out… merely to frown, when the seal held strong. It was Uzumaki-work after all, he deemed, as he pumped further chakra into the construct surrounding him, feeding it muscle and skin (Hashirama´s eye throbbed in protest; sharp pulses of pain piercing his skull), before letting two hands grip the stake anew, this time pulling it out with a sickening squelch.

From within the gardens, Kokuō howled in pain.

"Didn't you sedate him", he bellowed, even though he didn't hesitate to grab the second stake. Those had to go, no matter the pain wrenching them free caused.

"I can't infuse chakra." Hashirama's voice was a deep baritone full of anger and despite the situation, Madara found himself shivering with what might have been something close to arousal. "Not until those limiters are gone."

They better hurried up then, Madara decided, allowing Kokuō a moment to prepare, before tearing the second stake out, as well.

The third followed, then the fourth and when he pulled out the fifth, Hashirama had freed the Bijuu's head and started with the large ropes tying the rest of the Beast's body down. "Don't", Madara interrupted. "I'll be faster. Overload the seal-anchors, I will deal with the ropes right away."

Pulling out the last stake, two katana formed in his Susano's additional hands and Hashirama nodded, not even hesitating to burst the seals that had been created to anchor the ropes to the ground into pieces. He was fast, obviously pushing himself to hurry, before he leaped back to Kokuō's limp head on the ground.

Three clones grew at his feet and Madara frowned. "Don't overtax yourself."

Thay had, after all, fought a battle and despite Hashirama's god-like chakra-resources, healing a Tailed Beast *had* taken some toll, last time.

"Don't worry."

Madara huffed, entirely realising that wasn't a No, as he carefully cut the last rope, finally freeing Kokuō, who attempted to say something but was too weak to form the words.

"We'll get you back on your feet in no time", the Hokage promised, and Madara felt his neck prickle at the feeling of *oceans* of pure, powerful chakra being pumped into the Tailed Beast's head, chest, stomach and back.

"Bro-ther-"

"Hush", Hashirama soothed. "It's alright, it's fine. It'll be fine."

The Bijuu heaved a deep breath, trying to lift his head. "I am… sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about", the Hokage deemed, not taking his attention off his gigantic patient even as the first strings of Konohagakure's battle-forces arrived at the scene, led by Kakuzu. The assassin had re-gathered them, Madara noticed.

"Izuna and Tobirama will follow as soon as it's safe", Kakuzu reported. "The rest of our forces are underway; the Uchiha are covering the main body and retreat-routes."

Madara nodded. "The captivator-seals have been broken; Hashirama is doing his best to heal Kokuō." Not that is wasn't obvious, but better prevent any misunderstandings.

"Tobirama and Izuna will be safe here; as long as they stay close to Hashirama. Kimiko, Humaki, Daiki." The three Uzumaki stepped forward immediately. "Choose a squad; at least one Uchiha each, and search the palace for any trap-seals. If you find anything, do *not* engage in battle if possible, nor break the seals. Report back immediately."

"What about civilians?"

The Uchiha patriarch's lips thinned slightly. Who cared about them; they were useless anyway, but- "The princess deserted to our side. There might be other civilians supporting out course, as well. Secure anyone but do not strike, unless you are attacked first." He hesitated for a moment. "Also, add a Nara to each team. We are done taking risks."

Their shadow-controlling had proven its worth more than once already, after all.

"In-dra…"

Waiting until he received a nod from the three newly appointed team-leaders each, Madara turned around, quickly making his way to where Kokuō had tried to lift his head, obviously searching for him.

"I'm here", he soothed. "I wasn't far, don't worry."

"I am – sorry", the Tailed Beast said, repeating his earlier apology, and Madara shook his head. "None of this is your fault. There is nothing to apologise for", he deemed, stepping closer and raising his hand on the Bijuu's strangely soft nose in a show of comfort.

"They wanted- wanted your eyes", Kokuō continued nonetheless, apparently determined to tell him. "I couldn't – couldn't stop it… them, using my chakra… for Father's sacred Tools."

Madara blinked. Kokuō's father… the Sage of Six Paths? Those weapons had belonged to the Sage? That… explained a lot.

"Ashura."

Hashirama looked up from where he continued to infuse rivers upon rivers of chakra into Kokuō's limp, utterly spent body. "You shouldn't talk so much", he softly reprimanded.

"I will be – fine", Five-Tails deemed. "I just need some more – time to…", he took a strangely human, wheezing breath, "To get back on my feet. Matatabi-"

Hashirama's hands balled into fists and the ground cracked underneath him, tree-roots thrashing in anger and agony alike. "I'm sorry", he finally whispered, not quite meeting Kokuō's eyes. "We didn't know, we were… when we realised, she was already gone."

"She will need some help", Kokuō heaved, "When she emerges. I – Indra – feels chakra better than most." Madara blinked, not quite grasping the meaning, what – "Matatabi died", he said, trying to be gentle, and probably failing. This wasn't his forte. Hashirama, though… Hashirama was empathic enough, but still he couldn't just say nothing, could let Kokuō believe that his sister- "I felt it." He stared at the ground, gritting his teeth hard enough to feel them crack ever so slightly. "I didn't realise before. I would have – should have… I only realised when I felt her dying, when she… disappeared. I am sorry." More than he could ever put into words. He had never had a sister and maybe that was why he had felt rather close to her... which had made her death merely harder; just another sibling he hadn't been able to save.

Next to him, Kokuō took a breath that already sounded ever so slightly deeper than the previous ones.

“That is… why she will need you”, he said. “When she re-forms… You will be able to-“
“What?”

Under differing circumstances, it might have been hilarious, to see the God of Shinobi and his Fire-Demon of a lover both gape in disbelief – not that it was such a rare sight on the first one, though.

“You did not… know?” The Bijuu tried to reach a more comfortable position, carefully pulling his tails closer, as to not interrupt the wooden clone still working on his lower belly. “We are… chakra”, he then explained. “Father made us… from chakra. Chakra cannot… die. It merely… changes form.” He took another deep breath. “I felt my sister… dissolve. We all did. We all mourned. But… she will re-assemble. As soon as enough of her chakra manifests again, she will… be re-created. But neither of us know, where, and she might be… having trouble to adjust…”

“I will know.” There was a pause, a short break, in which Madara felt something drop off his chest; some kind of weight, of… not guilt. The guilt was still there, would never leave, probably, but- “I know her chakra. If she appears anywhere within Fire-Country or even any surrounding lands, I will know.”

Five-Tails smiled; a strange notion on his dolphin-like features.

“I do not think it will be long…”, he deemed. “We spoke… often, far more often than in the last centuries. She has… much to return to.”

“So do you”, Hashirama said, his voice strangely hoarse. “Hold still now, I’m not even close to be done, yet.”

Kokuō’s eyes slid close, as the giant Beast finally succumbed to peaceful sleep.

“Yes… brother.”

Chapter End Notes

So...

Anyone remembering how Kishimoto told us in Naruto how Tailed Beasts CAN'T die because if they do, they just re-appear after a while because they're out of fucking chakra?
No?
Obviously that friggin' loser writing Boruto didn't either, when he decided to write Kurama out of the show.

I planned the whole Matatabi-thing before his sorry ass fucked that up, just so you know!
Merely proves that excuse for a sequel doesn't even deserve to call itself canon.

Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hashirama was asleep.

Not that this was in any way concerning, except the sun had long risen and they had shit to do.

“Get up.”

“Five more minutes.”

Madara rolled his eyes – both of them his own again; Hashirama had re-implanted them right after the battle had ended, claiming if felt far too strange to have it constantly attempting to leech (not his word but definitely his meaning) at his chakra in order to gain more power. “You already had those. Get up.”

Strong arms wound around him, surrounding his torso and pulling him close to Hashirama’s chest; the Hokage’s heat seeping into him alongside the simmering oceans of chakra beneath his skin.

Madara closed his eyes, allowing himself to stay content for just a few minutes more as Hashirama’s warm breath ghosted over his hair. Maybe one day in the not-too-distant future, them getting up on time wouldn’t matter anymore. Maybe one day soon, the village wouldn’t need them anymore, so they could just spend their days in bed, not getting up before noon.

For now, though…

“You have thirty seconds to get up, before I set your pillow on fire.”

A deep sigh answered him and as the seconds ticked by, the Hokage strengthened his hold for just another moment, kissing the top of his lover’s unruly hair, before releasing him and rolling onto his back groaning. “What’s it for today?”

He knew he had already asked yesterday but forgotten the answer. There was just so much on their schedule these days.

“Meeting with the Daimyo.”

“Ah.” Hashirama sighed.

So no real change, compared to yesterday. Well then… it was still better than war, he thought.

“Good morning!”

Considering his Kage had refused to even get up on time today, his cheery greeting nearly made Madara twitch.

“If you would bring forth that attitude when I ask you to read one single document”, the Uchiha noted, making the Hokage in front of him wilt. “Ah… it’s just that paper-work is so repetitive… I tend to fall asleep during reading, you know?”

“I do”, the Uchiha noted wryly. “I finish your work, after all.”

Flanked by her two most trusted hand-maidens, the Daimyo watched the Hokage’s verbal scruffle.

While she had gotten used to it, it never failed to amaze her, nonetheless.

She was very aware Senju Hashirama was the village’s leader and his word would be followed, just as his seal was the one stamped underneath every single document regarding the village. However… the one truly holding the reins wasn’t him. Uchiha Madara refused to take official leadership (she had been told of how he had refused to even be put up as a possibility) but she -and probably everyone else within this village- were very aware that close to any decision he made would be backed by Senju Hashirama, whether it was a call for war… or peace.

It was a strange concept to her, and she had never heard of anything even slightly similar.

People in power would eliminate those threatening their position. It was a simple concept; the human strive for power and wealth.

The Hokage, though, seemed to have no interest in any of it.

She had wondered more than once, whether it was exactly that, which made him the most fitting candidate.

“Anyway.” Ah, it seemed they were going to get back on topic. “Yesterday you told us you consider returning to the castle. I won’t stop you, don’t get me wrong, but… I would invite you to stay with us a little longer."

“We cannot guarantee your safety once you leave the village”, Madara agreed. “We won’t let you travel alone and install body-guards within the castle but in the worst case, this will not be enough.” They just didn’t have the man-power to spare the numbers of shinobi required to entirely ensure the Daimyo’s safety, especially with the rogue Uzumaki still running about.

Sakuya nodded, understandingly but nevertheless unmoved. “I am aware”, she answered. “And I am grateful for your protection… and your trust.”

And nothing else it had been they had gifted her.

After the battle, part of Konohagakure's forces had searched the castle. They hadn't found any Uzumaki, neither any of the Kumo-nin allied with them… and they had they hadn't found her father, either.

What they *did* find, however, had been a terrified castle-staff… and the grave of her brother who had certainly *not* been dead when she had left the palace.

He had been against their father's plan – as had she- but apparently, her desertion had triggered their father's paranoia enough for him, to… she felt her lips thin.

To have him killed.

That at least was what the castle-staff had said and though she didn't want to believe it, it matched with her own experience with their father's ever-rising paranoia and his… adviser's constant feeding of it.

But since the castle had been seemingly evacuated in a haste, her father had apparently lacked opportunity to return to his office-chambers. Which meant that Konohagakue's shinobi had found her father's signets and official stamps amongst the clusters of undone paper-work, lying carelessly on a mess of half-way finished letters, maps and scrolls.

Those signets had been used for generations; they deigned letters with the authority of the Daimyo, getting passed along the royal line.

She could barely believe she had been given them back.

The power those signets had… Konohagakure would have been able to use them at their whim and it would have taken a long while for anyone to even start suspecting a thing.

Except they hadn't.

Instead, the Hokage had invited her to a meeting before dinner… and had returned the signets, the official papers, the royal drapes.

And since her brother was no more and her father had fled the castle – she was the only one left in the royal line. Not that it mattered, even if her father would return, she thought. The Hokage -or rather, Uchiha Madara, which was at least as binding as the Hokage's word- had straight out told her, Konohagakure's alliance to her father was forfeit. And while that wasn't anything surprising, the suggestion of her taking the title of Daimyo had been, indeed.

She had hesitated – briefly.

None of them knew, what happened to her father. According to the staff, he had been very much alive – at least before the battle. Since all of them had been flocked together in two rooms right after its start in order to "not have them mess things up", none of them could really know.

But in the end, she had decided, it didn't matter. Not truly.

Konohagakure were willing to work with her – not to pledge loyalty, but even that was far more than expected. If she decided to take on the title, she would have strong allies. Probably the strongest within Fire-Country. She could at least try to soothe the grounds her father had burned away. To do something good in this war-torn lands.

And thus, she had agreed.

Had taken the signets, had signed her own descent as Fire-Country's ruling Daimyo.

And had signed the contact with Konohagakure, which the Hokage's brother had had already prepared.

The Village hidden in the Leaf would be her exclusive contract-partner, and as such she would refuse contracting with any other shinobi-clans… just as the village would not take any larger contracts from anyone other than her.

Which brought her back to the actual topic of this conversation: Her return to the castle.

"I will forever be in your dept, Hokage-sama, for offering me refuge during these dark last few weeks", she started – and meant every word. Had Konohagakure not taken her in… she probably would be buried underneath the ground, next to her brother, by now. "But… I cannot leave the castle unattended. It is not in either of our shared interests for any usurper attempting to take over power."

With a sigh, Hashirama nodded. "It has been a pleasure having you with us", he offered, unbiddenly making her smile. "I will not depart today", she answered. "So there is no need for farewells, yet."

"Good", Madara noted. During her time in the village, Sakuya had gotten used to his piercing gaze. While the Hokage's kind, often strangely cheery nature was at times difficult to grasp for her, his… partner's sharp intelligence was a feat she could respect greatly. "We will need some time to prepare", the Uchiha continued. "As you said; we need to ensure your protection as best as possible, as soon as you leave the village."

Tobirama had already marked the castle's entrance and garden with teleportation-seals, allowing them a fast reaction should the remaining Kumo-shinobi decide to return, but nevertheless they needed to be careful to prevent assassination-attempts. It wasn't a question if they would happen, after all. Merely how soon.

It didn't matter, though, Madara decided. Not truly. Hashirama was so, so close to his dream of peace and every day, yet another puzzle-piece seemed to fall into place.

He would rip apart everything and everyone daring to get between Hashirama and his dream and burn their remains to ashes.

“Why did I know I would find you here?”

Hashirama looked up as his little brother stepped out of the trees, joining him at the giant glade.

“I want to be finished, when she returns”, he smiled and Tobirama kept silent for a moment. “It could be a long time, Anija. We shouldn’t get our hopes too high.” As harsh as it sounded, they should prioritise the other parts of what Izuna had decided to name the “Bijuu Backyard”.

Unsurprisingly, Kokuō had returned to Konoha alongside them, as soon as Hashirama had healed him up enough to make the journey back. He had made telepathic contact with the rest of his tailed siblings -and hadn’t that ability been a convenient piece of information nobody bothered to tell them before-, all of them in deep concern and agitation after the disappearance of Matatabi and then the loss of contact with him due to the Uzumaki sealings cutting him off.

And considering the rogue Uzumaki still running about, no one in Konoha had been too surprised when Hashirama had told them how he had asked the remaining Tailed Beasts to move closer to their village -at least for the time being. They would be safe here until they finally found where Kikoru and his few Uzumaki were hiding -and alongside them, whatever of Kumogakure were still deciding to side with them.

On the premise of eight very large, very tailed chakra-constructs roaming around the village, its leader of course had done the only responsible thing:

Re-structuring gigantic parsecs of the forest into whatever wishes any of the Bijuu might have.

Which also meant him begging Tobirama for a sea large enough to fit Isobu, because apparently Three-Tails didn’t merely look like a gigantic mutated turtle, he also preferred living in water.

At least Hashirama had agreed to make most parts of it underground so they wouldn’t have to tear down even more enormous parts of the forest.

Kokuō wasn’t too far off, dozing in the shadows of Hashirama’s freshly grown trees, large enough to shade him. The others would arrive soon, he had said, perhaps in a day or two (they… would have to prepare the new Daimyo for that, Tobirama deemed). But despite the pressing matter, the Hokage worked on perfecting what he already had created with his little brother quite some time ago; the glades and small river for Matatabi and her large rocks and boulders for sun-bathing.

Tobirama didn’t want to get his brother’s hopes in Matatabi returning up too fast; it would only hurt him if she didn’t. ‘Soon’, after all, had probably a different meaning for them than for an eons-old chakra-construct.

But he would be the last one to cruelly crush Hashirama’s hopes and dreams.

His older brother had proven him wrong often enough, by now. If he believed for Two-Tails to return, she would… and if she didn't, Hashirama would find a way to make it happen.

He always did, after all.

"I still think you are too hasty with giving away those weapons."

Turning his attention back to the trees he was working on, Hashirama shook his head. "Those were the Sage's weapons, Tobirama. They don't belong to us… they never should have been used by anyone other than him. Returning them to the Sage's grave is the only right decision."

Tobirama sighed. "At least ask the Bijuu, first", he said, grasping for that last straw. Those weapons were of immense power; having them available would basically guarantee the village's safety, as long as there was someone able to wield them.

But his older brother, as usual, thought different and had decided to return them to the Sage's grave and sealing them within. He would ask one or two of the Bijuu to accompany him, as soon as matters had calmed down somewhat.

"Have we heard anything new from Uzushio?", Hashirama asked, changing the topic with the elegance of a raging bull.

"Nothing", Tobirama confirmed his expectations.

Hashirama sighed, finally lowering his hands, apparently satisfied with his work, after all. "We can't give up on them. I'm certain there's people there wanting to join Konoha!"

Ah, Tobirama deemed. "About that…"

"I still can't believe it!"

"I still don't want to believe it."

"Love, please."

Madara didn't even mind to pause eating and while normally, Hashirama would have been at least a little bothered with his lack of enthusiasm, he couldn't find it in him to scold him when he was, for once, having an appetite. It felt like even though food was one of the basic human cravings, Madara just had never gotten that particular memo.

But it didn't matter, Hashirama decided. Not in the long run.

The Bijuu were coming for them.

Mito had taken out who -or rather, what?- apparently had been the leading head in this whole war against their village. He would support her best as he could.

But nevertheless, he was glad that apparently, she had found close friends in Tobirama, Izuna and Kakuzu -even though he really wished at least one of them had deigned to tell him of those experiments they had been working on for over a year now!

It was a small comfort that apparently, Madara hadn't known, either. (Or perhaps that merely made the whole thing even more worrying.)

Hashirama supressed a sigh as he looked at the Uchiha's plate. Maybe some more peppers would do the trick; it was common knowledge by now Uchiha liked to eat spicy. He would make sure to include a variety during their next dinner, he decided. Maybe even trying to grow differing kinds himself… It might be interesting, to see how he could influence their spice.

"They are a bunch of ignorant, arrogant morons and we would be better off without them!"

Despite Madara's tone -or perhaps right because of it- the Hokage smiled, returning to the matter at hand. "But they wouldn't be better off without us, would they?"

The raven huffed. "And why the hell would we care? The Hyuuga are a plague! As soon as they arrive here, they'll try to force themselves upon us! Next we know, they'll have us seal our own children."

"Except they decided to revise their sealing-practise and we don't have any children", Hashirama hummed, re-filling his bowl with a second serving of ramen-noodles.

"Not yet."

The broth sloshed over his bowl's edge and he felt his mouth open and close, as he dumbly stared at the man sitting with him at the dinner-table. He had- didn't- when – it was-

"Also, revising means nothing, Hashirama", Madara continued, not even bothering to look up from where he picked out the chilis out of his food, snacking them without caring for the rest of his dinner yet again. "Maybe they'll revise to sealing every single second-born in every single family. Maybe they'll seal everyone as soon as they reach adulthood. Don't be naïve. Hyuuga are a bunch of arrogant, ruthless bastards who just want to take advantage of the village's safety!"

"Not yet."

Madara huffed. "Of course, not yet, you ninny. Before you write them back and invite them for another meeting, you and I will talk about it! And trust me, I *will* get Tobirama on my side with that! We can't have you and your big heart make every single decision!"

"We don't have children… *yet*."

Finally, the raven raised a single, sleek eyebrow. "*That* is what you decided to focus on? Of course we don't have children. In case you didn't notice, we both have a dick, and-" A warm

mouth interrupted him as Hashirama moved with a speed entirely unfitting for just another shared dinner. His hands buried themselves in a mess of raven hair, keeping the Uchiha close as vines emerged from his wooden chair, wrapping around his legs, sprouting white flowers.

A hot tongue slid in his mouth, licking the inner side of his lower lip and when Hashirama finally pulled away, his lungs were screaming for oxygen.

Hashirama laughed in joy, his eyes bright and staring right into his very soul.

“Marry me?”

The era of war was over.

Their little brothers were plotting within the Hokage-tower’s basement.

Matatabi would return soon.

Outside, he could hear children shrieking in joy.

He smiled.

“Fine.”

Chapter End Notes

When I started this story five years ago, I was aiming for a OneShot.
Since then, I started and finished Master-Studies, moved twice across the country and started my first job.

This is without doubt the longest "OneShot" I have ever written in my life and something I'm damn proud of, even if I really struggled with my muse over the last year and a half.
Thank you, dear Makkoska, for our late-night debates and your ever-lasting support.
And thank all of you for stick with me up to this point.

See you tomorrow, for when I upload the epilogue.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"And that?"

The man smiled. "Don't be like that. You know perfectly well those are our Kage; the village's leaders. Every one of them is going to be portrayed on the mountain-side, so they can watch the village forever, starting with Lord First, Senju Hashirama."

The boy nodded. "O'course I know that", he whined. "But that one on the left has a Sharingan! The Uchiha have the Sharingan. Where did he get it? Did he-" The boy's eyes widened in shock, "Did he *steal* it?!"

This time, the man laughed, ruffling his son's hair. "He didn't steal it", he soothed. "Lord First would have never done something so horrifying." He stopped, pointing at the large portrayed faces in the wall, and made sure the boy's gaze followed his finger.

"*This* one", he stressed pointing at the second face from the left, "Is Lord First. *That* one", this time, he pointed at the very outer face, carved left of Lord First, "Is his husband."

The little boy blinked. "But… But the wall is only for Hokage", he protested and his father smiled a little. It was a common misunderstanding, that even though there were five faces carved into the mountain-side, there had only been four Hokage up to today.

"Do you want to know why he's there?", he whispered in the child's ear, squatting down next to him, and the boy nodded furiously, making his father smile. "He's there because without him, there would be no village. Lord First wanted to found it, to end the war that was raging before our village was created. So, during one particularly bloody battle, he asked the leader of the Senjus' most hostile enemy – the Uchiha-clan."

The boy's mouth fell open. "But- But- the Senju and the Uchiha, they're like- like *so!*" He twisted his fingers together to show how very interwoven the two clans were. Last week, he had yelled at his best friend for being a douche-bag after ditching him, because the cheater had wanted to play with his older brother instead of him, and a Senju kunoichi had pulled his ear for it.

The man nodded. "They are", he agreed. "But they were really bad enemies, back then. So, Lord First asked the leader of the Uchiha-clan for peace, which was… a very brave thing to do. And the Uchiha-leader agreed. So, they formed the village and somewhere along the line, Lord First and the Uchiha-leader fell in love." He bowed closer, enjoying his son's awe-struck expression as he whispered into his ear, "Some say they had already fallen in love during their countless battles, before."

Eyes large as saucers, the boy looked at him. "So they put him there, because he helped make the village?"

The man smiled. “He did far more than that”, he said. “During a war, he gave Lord First one of his own eyes, so they could win against their enemies together. He also fought against a Bijuu who had been forced to attack the village, nearly losing his eye-sight during the battle. In fact…”, he smiled, slightly mischievous, “Nine-Tails is said to have become his best friend, after the battle.”

Even bigger, his son’s eyes got. “He was friends with Nine-Tails?”

Everyone knew, Nine-Tails was a meanie and rarely got along with anyone! He came to the village every so often, as all of the Bijuu did, but he was the grumpiest of them all!

The man nodded. “He gave just as much to our village, as Lord First did. Without him, it would never have been founded. So it’s only just, that they have added his face onto the mountain. Even though rumours say, he objected against it.” (It wasn’t rumours, though. There were still scorching marks on the boulders, marking the objection of Lord First’s spouse. His temper was just as legendary, as his battle-prowess. Kind of like his own wife’s, he thought wryly.)

“What’s his name?”

The man smiled. “Uchiha Madara.”

“Uchiha Madara”, the boy repeated. Then, he nodded resolutely, his blonde hair flying in every direction. “One day, I’ll be just as awesome, as he was. And I’ll start by making friends with Nine-Tails.

Believe it!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!